

# **ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN**

## **CAVING CLUB**



**MAY / JUNE / JULY 1974**

**NEWS LETTER No 53**

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Myrtle Cottage  
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## **FOREST NEWS**

The death of Roger Solari has cast a gloom over activities during the second half of June , no formal obituary appears in this news letter but it is hoped to publish a collection of caving anecdotes concerning Roger in the next edition .

## **CLEARWELL CAVES**

For the time being it is advised that cavers do not enter the show mine as thieves have been active again , this time taking £10 worth of pottery . The police will be keeping a regular watch on the entrance .

## **CLAYS WOOD**

John Elliott has been into Sling dig and found it was still possible , after a struggle to get down to the level . John and Colin Clements hope to do some exploring etc in this area , a new look at this old dig would not go amiss . Clays Wood is now owned by a Mr Nash who many years ago worked Down Sling , a very interesting man to talk to .

## **ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY**

Plymouth Caving Group News Letter and Journal No's 55 & 56 .  
Descent No 28 June 1974 .

## **TRIPS**

7<sup>th</sup> July - Cave Rescue practice at Oakwood Mill Deep .  
21<sup>st</sup> July - ( Weekend ) The Gower caves Llethrid and Tooth .

## **NEW MEMBERS**

Doug Mclean  
14 Hampshire Gardens  
Coleford  
Glos

Roslyn Green  
90 Salisbury Rd  
Mosely  
Birmingham B13 8JY

Welcome to the Club .

## **LIBRARIAN**

Stephen Potts is leaving the area soon and this committee position will come vacant , volunteers please contact Sue .

## **SPARES**

Main and Dip bulbs for two and three cell , cable , carbide lamps and electrolyte all for sale , contact Gordon Burch .

ROGER SOLARI

The Club greatly regrets the loss of Roger Solari who failed to return from a dive into Agen Allwed sump 4 on Saturday, 15th June, 1974.

Roger had been in the Club for about ten years and was one of the original members. He was very active in all aspects of caving with interests in photography, surveying, cave rescue and diving. These were pursued with an enthusiasm that made it difficult for others to keep pace.

Our sympathies go to his parents, Andy and Kath.

**MANOR FARM REVISITED**

Following the earlier trip to Manor Farm Swallet to satisfy our curiosity about this relatively new cave, a further trip was arranged to see if we could find the dry series we had missed. Colin had some peculiar idea about getting down to the bottom of the cave and back to the Butchers Arms before closing time but I think he has been watching too many BMC adverts. In the end we did go in his banger but at a more sedate pace with the idea of photographing the cave as well.

We had arranged to meet John Berry at Burrington but somehow arrived late after visiting Weston on the new motorway system. He was already at the cave and we made arrangements with the farmer for an 11 o'clock out instead of his normal 10. Two cavers were already at the cave entrance but made way for us they were playing on the entrance pitch. Down the 50 ft pitch, along the crawl and we reached the top of the tight 20ft pitch. I had forgotten the ladder required but it proved easier on just a rope. On down the long steep rift with two further pitches and we had reached the bottom of the cave about 1 ¼ hours from the surface.

The two cavers we had met at the entrance had given us an idea of the way into the dry series and it proved very easy to find. How we missed it last time I do not know. The climb up was through a fairly tight hole through boulders and lies just after a tight winding section and nearly at the end of the cave. A sloping rock ledge leads up the left hand wall and the hole is at the top of it. Above lies an extensive dry series that is obviously the old cave series. It passes well beyond the limit of the newer cave below but terminates in a series of clay in-fills that have come down from above. The in-fills appear to be from an even higher series. Mendip cavers are obviously busy digging here but the downward direction would look to be more promising.

Photography went very badly. My flash gun had a flat battery, Colin's had dodgy contacts and my stomach wanted me out of the cave. Some quick photo's were taken with me 'riding' Colin's flash and then we headed out. Good formations in the newer stream passage meant a couple of brief stops, we again got lost for a short time up an aven and then surfaced around 11.15 pm.

Jim Hay.

After arriving promptly at our first club trip for many a long month Laurence and I were soon joined by Chris and Sue Clark plus two kids and a dog. Andy Solari turned up next and we all had a long wait for John Elliott and Heather.

After kitting up we made our way through the woods towards Devil's Ditch. On the way we passed many scowls, much overgrown but worthy of further investigation. We looked at a mysterious shaft which John E and others have dug in. It is about 8ft in diameter and 20 - 30 ft deep at the moment, the fill being the usual bedsteads etc but apparently there is a strong draught through the rubbish. It could well be an old air shaft, perhaps for Tufts Level? Page 54 of Sibly shows a section along Tufts Level to Devil's Ditch but shown dotted ie it is not on the section line, a pit is shown but no name for it is given.

Hushets Old Pit is mentioned in Trotter's book but it looks to be too far north by the map on page 64. A further study of the 6 inch geological map might throw some light on it.

On to Devil's Ditch where the rest of us left John to do his own thing down a hole that had the remains of a timber frame above it. Together with the kids and dog we slid down a great scree slope of beach leaves into the Ditch itself. Round a corner we found the bottom of a 100ft unlined shaft connected to the Ditch by a short passage showing several shot-hole marks. After a brief look around we took some photo's and climbed back out for a walk along the Ditch.

On the surface nearby we noticed a circular platform of stone and earth about 20ft in diameter. After pondering for a while we realised that it was the base for a horse whim which would have worked the shaft we had found down below. It is well preserved and even has the hole in the centre where the haulage drum would have pivoted. As far as we know no other horse whim site has been identified in the Forest, though there must be many of them.

We followed the Ditch south where it gets wider and shallow crossed over and returned to find John out of his hole, which didn't go and investigated another hole which didn't go either.

Returning to the Land Rovers etc, Laurence, Andy and myself decided to have a look at Dug In, Dug Out Hole. And after listening to the usual lies from John on how dry, clean etc the entrance was by now we re-dug the place and squeezed down through the goo into a very interesting mine.

The workings gradually open into sizable chambers which are very photogenic, we spent some time with the camera in these. A large modern looking drivage is driven down to explore down dip but proved to be barren. The mine was probably worked in the later half of the last century (see Sibly) a lot of work was done in the area at that time.

Sticking my neck out I would suggest that a large part of the ore there was worked out within the last 200 years, the shot holes in numerous small pits would tend to confirm this, the 'Roman' workings being mostly surface diggings only.

A very rewarding morning but the whole area needs a lot closer study. The shaft (brick lined I forgot to add) needs identifying and what about 'Richards Joint'? This should lie about 130 yds NW of Devils Ditch and is reputed to be 240ft deep when mined around 1880, plenty of scope for Wednesday evening.

Roger Bailey.

## **COPPER HILL MINE - Mid Wales , Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May**

Geoff Broadman , Andy Solari , Tony Wahl met myself , Heather and Chris Clark at Cwmystwyth Mine . We returned to the next valley to Copper Hill Mine .

Now due to me forgetting to mention about bringing wet suits , Andy and Geoff hadn't brought theirs . Tony who was wise , had . We ( Tony , Chris and myself ) entered the level while the others explored some nearby mines finding a very good one .

The water was chin deep on me ( waist deep on Chris ) and very cold . We reached the shaft and put 50 ft of ladder down . I descended this but could not reach the bottom . We explored the rest of the levels then made our way out .

Chris and I returned with more ladder and I reached a landing stage at 90ft . A short wooden ladder led into a level . Chris came down and we both admired the walls which were coated in calcite and had blue stains from the copper minerals running down it .

We explored the level but the only way on was another pitch on down the stope . Unfortunately we had no more ladder so we went out .

John Elliott .

## **EASTER WEEKEND**

Phil Schwartz joined me for a look around some of the lesser sites of South Wales . We started in the Trefil area and after some dirt tracking round the quarry in my Land Rover , found the cave . The working had broken into them and the main one Ogof Faur Trefil is 300ft of larhe keyhole shaped passage .

I showed Phil my potential dig in the abandoned quarry but he was not over impressed.

We moved on to Porth - Yr - Ogof but couldn't find any RFDCC boys there ( funny we thought ) we kipped down near little Neath Twiddle cave and in the morning walked down valley to the Pant Mawr and Little Neath ( separate ) resurgences . We noted some possible digs , one of which was most impressive and I reckon it could be the old resurgence of Pant Mawr . However it would take a lot of work to open up. We moved off to the Blaen Onneu Caves which were quite impressive . A large entrance in the quarry face ended after a short distance and a hole in the quarry floor was noted . In the absence of a belay the Land Rover was backed up and a ladder attached to my tow hitch . After this 15ft pitch there were two ways on . One fissled out in boulders , the other way led via a 30ft pitch to a boulder choke but there was every indication that a large stream was once in the cave and probably fed some of the older passages in Aggen Allwedd . Digging on would need hard work and chemical persuasion but could be rewarding .

To finish off the day we visited Ogof Pen Eryr at Llangattoch , a pleasant 700ft cave ending in the usual massive breakdown common to other nearby caves

A useful weekend .

John Elliott .

## **PIERCEFIELD CLIFFS - CHEPSTOW**

A local contact of Sparkys took Heather and myself, Sparky and Stuart Jones on an interesting trip around Pierce field .

We visited a cave which lies below Giants Cave ( on 2 ½ map ) which contains about 60ft of passage ( 40ft walking ) plus a low bedding plane carrying a large flow emerges below high tide line . This water probably comes from the St Arvans sinks some 400ft higher and one mile away . The bedding plane was later attacked and 8 ft of progress made , however drilling and banging is what is needed .

Our guide showed us two of the fabled lead mines , one a level some 60ft long the other more interesting was about 1,000ft long and contained a vertical working 18 ft deep descended on ships ladder ( in situ ) A most interesting day .

John Elliott .

## **RED PIT DEVELOPMENTS**

In the last three months there has been a great deal of activity in Red Pit ( Old Bow in Sibly's etc but " Red Pit " on mine plans ) re-capping for those who are not too familiar with the ground , we can get to Red Pit from what we call Old Bow but not down dip from Red Pit to the main Easter Iron Mine because of roof falls .

John Elliott and Phil Schwartz had been investigating the southern end of the mine while Diana Court and Ian Standing had been surveying up to the fall . At this point it was thought that a dug along the side of the level into the fall would uncover the Easter side of the Tee Junction that leads to Red Pit shaft . However after digging at least 15ft beyond where the level should be we were bemoaning the accuracy of the old surveyor . In the meantime Ian , our modern surveyor was having doubts about his Saunto compass as his survey did not line up with the old plan .

Modesty does not allow me to tell you the name of the genius who put two and two together and realised that for about nine years we have misread the old plan , but once this essential point had been grasped our respect for WH Fryer was reinstated and the Saunto compass recovered from the dustbin !

We had always thought that the junction next to the fall was a prominent junction shown near to the shaft on Fryer's survey of 1880 , but in fact it was another junction 70ft south !

A start was then made in digging through the end of the fall and for several weeks on Tuesdays and Saturday evenings and a large amount of material was removed . However we have now got to a point where it is obvious that the fall is much longer than we had first thought and being in sandy ground it is very difficult to prop anything solid .

We have left the dig to cool for a while and in the meantime the effort is being made to survey the ground at the south end where there is possibility of getting on to a lower level which looks like it could bring us out beyond the fall . We think we may have found the end of this level but it runs straight into a very large fall .

Much of the lower southern end seems to have been worked from the Yew Tree Pit area and a small back-filled level that has been driven from the south ie Yew Tree , has been found . Surveying has shown this level to run within 70ft of Old and New Yew Tree Pits . If we can get into these pits further progress would depend on what workings have been driven across the strike .

Digging and exploration on Tuesdays and Saturday evenings , the Saturday shift comes out in time for cider, people who are careful with their feet are welcome .

Roger Bailey .

## **THE DIVING FATALITY IN AGGEN ALLWEDD**

On Friday evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> June Roger Solari and Myself left for South Wales meeting Martin Farr ( SWCC ) and others in the ' Brit ' Crick Howell . We spent a pleasant night at The Ruin Llangattock . The next morning Colin Fairburn ( SWCC ) myself plus two lads from London entered Aggen Allwedd and pressed on with the remaining diving gear to the terminal sump via Southern Stream Passage . At this point you are some two miles distance from the entrance .

Roger and Martin joined us and kitted up . At about 2.30 pm they dived for what they knew would be a record length of cave , almost certainly a world record .

We continued with the Grand Circle route out via the fourth choke and surfaced after nine hours to the rolling of heavy thunder .

Later that night I returned to the Chelsea hut with Colin Edmunds ( Cwmbran CC ) and heard from Martin , who had just got out , the shattering news that Roger hadn't made it back from the fourth sump . We immediately alerted the Police and cave rescue and we called in John Parker the best diver available .

To complicate matters another 'sherpa ' support party were long overdue and were doing the Grand Circle route . They eventually emerged after 16 hours underground .

Diving equipment which arrived from Bristol was taken into the cave and by Sunday evening an attempt was made to dive . However the heavy rains which had plagued the South had with typically bad timing resulted in bad visibility and the dive was abandoned after an all night session underground .

## **WHAT HAPPENED ?**

When Roger and Martin left us they had to pass three sumps , 250ft , 100ft and 850ft . This then led them to about 1500ft of large stream way which ended in another sump , this they were to dive .

Roger dived first with Martin following . The sump deepened to about 50 - 60ft and as Roger was having trouble clearing his ears Martin took over the lead . Some 400ft in the passage began to rise steeply and although low on air Martin decided to push further . He signalled Roger to return and swam on .

Unfortunately no air space was available so dropping the line Martin turned about . It was then Martin saw that Roger had followed so signalling a fast return made off down . Martin waited twice although nearly out of air but Roger never followed . A long anxious wait then followed and eventually Martin experimentally pulled hard on the line only to find it came in and was cut off at the end , a sure sign of serious trouble . There was nothing he could do except head back to the surface .

## **NEXT ATTEMPT**

On the following Thursday a team of ten divers ( myself and Colin Graham from this area ) entered the cave and proceeded to the terminal sump . It was our job to locate the body and decide if it was possible to bring it back through the sumps .

Colin Edmunds and John Parker dived while we settled down for a long wait . However Colin returned with the news that visibility was still very poor , at one foot , and he had turned back at sump three . Parker had carried on alone with four bottles of air .

After about three and a half hours he returned . He had dived sump four and laid about 500ft plus of line in bad visibility but he had not been able to find Roger , after a short discussion we all decided that further risks were pointless and recommended that the rescue effort be called off .

We surfaced with some gear after ten and a half hours .

Roger will be missed not only by those who caved with him in the Forest but by cavers all over the country . His enthusiasm carried him to all regions and he was progressing well as a cave diver with successes in South Wales ( Dan-Yr-Ogof ) , Yorkshire ( Boreham Cave ) and Ireland ( Arch Cave , Prods Pot etc ) As a friend to me he cannot be replaced . From early days we caved together and be it in the Forest or the Pyrenees we shared experiences not easily found in daily life . Our sympathies go out to Kath and Andy who lost their son .

John Elliott .