

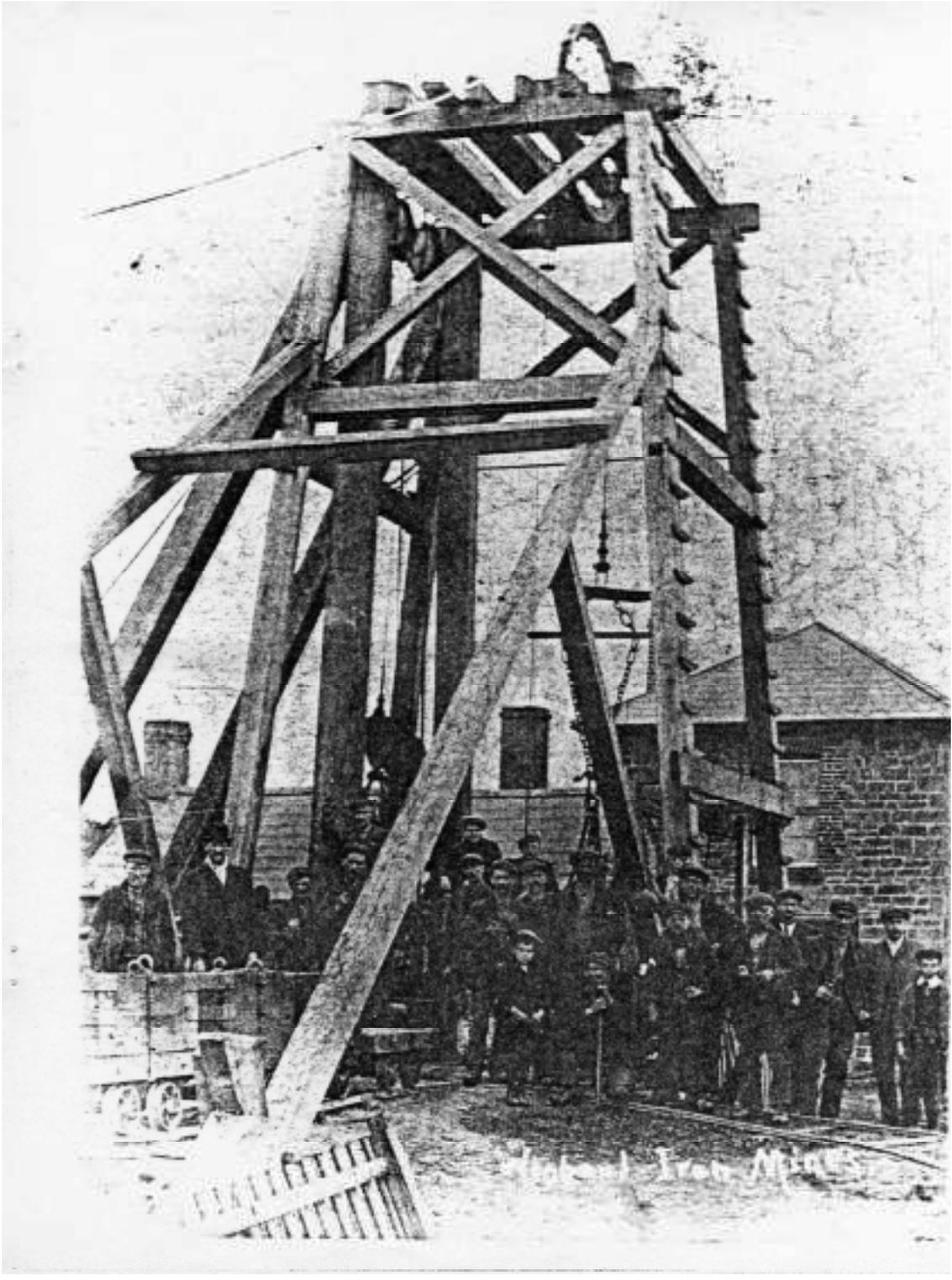
ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN

CAVING CLUB



APRIL 1975

NEWS LETTER No 57



Wooden Iron Works

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Front Photo :- Wigpool Iron Mine Pit Head About 1900 .

NEWS LETTER No 57

April 1975 .

CLUB NEWS

My apologies for the delay since the last news letter - the house rebuilding has not gone as well as it should have done . Unfortunately the council are at last losing patience and insisting that I do something .

However , all is now put right and there are no further excuses for future news letters .

We had something of a disaster with the printing last month . A new batch of paper was used and it was too thin to accept print on both sides . This really upset the budgeting as it nearly doubles the cost of a news letter . To those that had some of the early , salvaged versions , again apologies . Everyone else got a news letter printed by our standby method and god help us if they find out . This news letter and the next four or five was such a bargain .

After the above , I hesitate to say it but welcome to the following new members :-

Michael Barnard
28 Redhill Rd
Ross on Wye
Hfds

Robert Gillespie
The Annexe
Peterstow House
Ross on Wye
Hfds

And to CJ Mitchell whose address I have yet to get from the Sec .

The epic overnight stop of John Berry and his merry men in Wigpool has inspired another group to try for a complete weekend . So the weekend of May 9th to 11th will see a small group camping in Old Ham from Friday night to Sunday night . Work is likely to be concentrated on a break through into Sling Pit but it is intended to do some surveying and some photography . Anyone interested is welcome for all or part of the time .

Those intending to camp should contact John Elliott or Jim Hay for details . Numbers committed so far are five (I think)

The water levels in the Forest Mines have been doing their own thing and rising at widely different rates in different mines . In January , Alan Garman was able to do a round trip in Wigpod with only knee deep wading yet New Dunn was well on its way up over the third landing . I do not know where Wigpool water is now but New Dunn is the highest for some time .

The second landing is covered and that indicates a rise in the water table of over 60 ft in four months . We will need a really dry summer to dry out third landing again next winter .

The AGM of the GCRG will be held at the Butchers Arms on Thursday 22nd May. It will be an important meeting as a number of the existing committee members will not be standing again and fresh blood will be required to fill the positions. At least come along and criticise (constructively) even if you are not prepared to take a committee place.

The club shield that was lost has been found. Amazing how these things turn up. Has anyone seen my krab and 25 ft of ladder?

Whitson weekend is the 24th to 26th May this year. Some members are going to Doleinion again to do some walking in the Cader Idris area. It might also be that some mining in the Dolgethlaŷ area will take place. Anyone welcome.

The skittles match against GSS was complicated by the addition of Harrow Moles but by some adjustment to the score to compensate for the handicap, the Forest club won by a narrow margin.

The club are purchasing rolls of the self adhesive clear film for covering maps and surveys. Some additional has been purchased to sell to club members for their own maps. Sue has the film on sale at 20p per yard in 18" width. A copy of the new metric Ordnance survey map of the Forest has been purchased by the club for the Butchers wall and will be up soon as it is covered in the clear film.

Seymour Swallet has been surveyed by Dejj, Norman, Dave Underhill and Jean on some of their frequent visits to the Forest. The survey should be very interesting when it is drawn out.

The annual trips for the County Police Cadets took place during the month. I do not know if the leaders are getting old but the police are beginning to complain that the trips are not strenuous enough. Once upon a time they complained about the opposite. Nevertheless, the three trips went off very well and those that gave help with leading and lamps are thanked.

Otter Hole is at a critical stage with exploration stopped by sump three. Sump two was passed fairly easily as it is only two feet through and shallow but sump three is a different matter. The sump pool is 40ft by 12 feet and deep, the stream appears to come through an arch about 4ft down but the distance through is not known. Divers are preparing themselves and the next news letter should have details.

NEWS FROM THE OTHER AREAS

There has been a great deal of concern over the death of David Huxtable recently who was killed when abseiling down Gaping Ghyll. The rope was a 10mm polypropylene staple and it broke where it passed over the relatively sharp edge. Tests on poly 'ropes have shown that they have very little resistance to abrasion over sharp edges and should be used with great care. It is strongly recommended the poly ' is not used for abseiling or prussiking or in any situation where shock loading can occur.

In the next news letter, it is intended to publish a summary of the problems with poly ' and to give rope handling advice to reduce the possibility of an accident.

NOTE: All of the clubs rope is of the poly ' staple type.

The Cambrian Caving Council is applying for grant aid in future from the sports council for Wales rather than from English Sports Council via the National Caving Assoc'. This is because the English cash seems to be drying up and the Welsh Sports Council seems to be more pro-caving. At the moment, canoeing receives grant aid at a rate of around £3 per person indulging, dimbing at a rate of around 50p while cavers are helped out with the sum of 7 ½ p each.

Chelsea are arranging to replenish the food dumps in Agen Allwedd. The food has been ordered but is not yet in place.

A party from Bedford recently had all their clothing and possessions stolen from their car while caving down Manor Farm. The Mendip Police advice is that cavers should put all valuables in the boot of the car where it is more difficult to get at.

South Wales Caving club have set up a Conservation fund to fight such problems as the possible quarrying of OFD. A sponsored walk on Easter Sunday is expected to raise around £750 to go towards cave conservation.

Bat men are causing concern in areas other than the Cotswold and the Forest. It has been suggested recently that the decline in bat population is due to cavers disturbing the bats. Most cavers feel that the collecting and ringing of bats disturbs them far more than cavers do. Watch out for some adverse publicity in the future because the bat men seem to have the TV and papers on their side at the moment. The Conservation Committee of NCA are doing their best to give the cavers side of the story.

The dry upstream series of Porth - yr - Ogof has been pushed by John Parker and Pete Lord for a further ¼ mile a large fault stops progress. A survey of the extension has been produced.

An old iron mine has recently been discovered on Mynydd Llangynidr and the location is being kept a secret for a while as it is of great industrial archaeological interest. The discoveries apparently had a lucky escape as backed up mine water washed them out of the dig when they broke through. It would be interesting to see it later on to compare it with Forest Iron Mines.

While on the subject of Iron Mines, it was announced that Llanharry Iron Mine is to close in July this year. It has been making losses for some time and must now close. Whether this will improve access to cavers or stop it altogether remains to be seen.

The boundary reorganisation in Wales has meant that different Police groups cover different areas than before than before. This has meant the need to reorganise the cave rescue arrangements in South Wales. The Chief Superintendent of Powys convened a meeting in Brecon on April 12th to discuss cave rescue with all the police and rescue groups concerned. Nothing has been heard yet as a result of this meeting but it could affect our relationship with South Wales rescue groups.

Chelsea are preparing a new survey of the Agen Allwed area to include all the lesser caves around Agen Allwed itself. Both Daren Cilau and Eblwys Faen are included.

For those that haven't yet realised it - there are seven (or is it ten) films on caving on TV on BBC 2 on Wednesday evenings at 7.05 pm. The first was on OFD when some very peculiar characters were seen while the second was on Kingsdale in Yorkshire. The third was on Yugoslavia and if you miss them on Wed 's, they can be seen on Sundays. Funny that the BBC has chosen the two times that our Club goes caving. Still - they are not really meant for cavers.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Doug acquired some copies of the tide tables for the Bristol Channel and has donated one to the club library. It is essential reading for anyone venturing into Otter Hole but remember the difference between GMT and BST.

CAVE PROJECTS GROUP - News Letter No 5.

This is far too big a publication to cavers in a short review. At 50p it is also very good value. Without doubt it is the finest publication covering the Forest area dealing in detail with the Wye valley drainage and the Bishopswood area. It also contains much of interest and original work in Ireland, Yorkshire, Sutherland and South Wales.

From the Forest point of view, the publication is marred by a number of half truths and untruths about the Forest Club and by the apparent deliberate omission of discoveries by the club. All most unfortunate as it detracts from what must be an excellent reference book for Forest cavers.

PLYMOUTH CAVING GROUP - NEWS LETTER AND JOURNAL

This another publication from a caving club that has no date or number . All most difficult for club librarian who has to file them . Plymouth contains a wide variety of articles including the following :-

The AGM Minutes
Photographic Competition - Wheal Zion Mine
Dunstone Hole Cave - Exposure
Greater Horseshoe Cave - Lamp Information
Club Leadership Scheme - Polypropylene rope

BRITISH CAVER RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Transactions Volume 1

Bulletin Number 7

No 4 December 1974

February 1975

CAVING COMMENTS (A reply to the news letter 'Beano' section)

Dear Cavers ,

As those of you who are experienced cavers will have guessed , the rescue publicised in Feb 1975 News Letter No 56 was in fact a put up job .

Those of you familiar with the Clearwell Iron Mines will , of course , have realised that the action did not take place in the above area but was enacted at the bottom of Fairplay Shaft , near Westbury Brook Iron Mine .

Here is a short account of what really happened .

A life sized model of a well known dentist , loaned by GCRG , was hurled down the shaft to simulate a caver who had slipped whilst trying to free climb out . Suitable pre - recorded screams were lowered down and , tying a clothes line to the leg of a local bobby , I descended into the depths , quickly followed by the cameraman , Mr Jim Hay, suitably equipped with his triple lens reflex instamatic and fifty six pounds of flash powder . Having set everything up , we found the flash powder was damp and so had to set fire to that extremely life like dummy to obtain enough light to film by .

As you saw from the finished results , (re-touched of course) we got some great action shots . The whole shebang took nine days , eight of which were spent in trying to climb out via the plastic clothes line (you try it) Our anchor man , the bobby , remained at rigid attention throughout the whole time .

Special thanks are due to ATV for the loan of film and sound equipment and to John Elliott for suggesting the use of Fairplay Shaft as being safer for Jim and I than Old Ham .

Gordon Burch

The new helicopter caving lights are on sale at your club stores , price £325 each (batteries extra)
Has anyone seen Ian lately .

£23,500 for a hole in the ground

A LOT of people tried to buy a hole in the ground this week. It was finally auctioned to a solicitor for £23,500.

Mind you, it was a pretty big hole—a mile and a half long and 600ft deep.

It is called White Scar Cave and is at Ingleton in Yorkshire.

People feared that the cave, which is open to the public, might be bought by a company which would close it.

Another worried group were the National Caving Association, who want the caves to remain open for exploration.

Caves are still finding passages more than fifty years after the White Scar was discovered.

Rivers

There are underground rivers, waterfalls, stalactites and stalagmites.

These are limestone columns which hang from the roof or rise from the floor.

They have built up over thousands of years as water dripped from the ceilings.

The way to remember the difference between them is to think of the C in stalactite standing for "ceiling" and the G in stalagmite for "ground."

Most big cave systems are formed in areas where there is a lot of

limestone or similar rock.

Rain seeps through the limestone and the water becomes a weak solution of carbonic acid.

This eats away a crack. The crack becomes a gap. Over thousands of years the gaps can become big caverns.

Many good show caves are open in Britain. In Derbyshire there is a cavern with an entrance big enough to contain two cottages and a small ropeway.

Not far away there are caves where the tourists go on an underground golf tour.

Excavations in some Welsh caves, Dan yr Ogof in Breconshire have discovered six miles of

passages.

But near Grenoble, in France, there is a cave nearly 4,000ft deep.

The biggest is in the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico.

There are caves called the Big Room is 4,700ft long, 600ft across and 120ft high—as big as a small football ground.

Ancient man used caves as homes and even as temples. Some have wall paintings 10,000 years old.

Caves in Britain have not found anything so exciting, but they still happily employ hundreds of feet underground in pitch darkness.

CACIPHONAL

'Jimmy is really asking for trouble this time.'

'Hay, of course, must be quite, quite mad.'

To see an uncomfortable moment. These members

£23,000 FOR CAVES

White Scar caves, near Ingleton, Yorks, were sold yesterday at Kirkby Lonsdale for £23,500. They were bought by Mr Antony Bagshaw, 47, a retired chartered surveyor, Marlborough Hall, Uxtoneter, Staffs, who has never set foot in them.

"I take it you've never been mountaineering before?"



WHERE IT IS , THERE IT IS - Cornish Miners Saying

On one damp day in March last year , Alan Marriot and I made a kind of pilgrimage to Redbook looking for the copper mine that was reported to have existed thereabouts , nearly three centuries ago . We directed attention to the steep and densely wooded hillside behind the Tinsplate Works , but in such terrain (which has clearly been worked for much stone) the task was pretty hopeless and we came away with nothing .

We may of course have gone to the wrong place and in the event the excavations at surface may never have amounted to more than a few square yards .

Following the visit , Alan wrote an account which appeared in the November News Letter and out of some subsequent correspondence your editor has asked me for a contribution on unusual occurrences of copper in Britain - not that I am beyond an amateur in such matters . However here it is

Other than coal measures , the Forest is comprised of Old Red Sandstone - stone and carboniferous limestone , so I shall therefore confine my remarks to these formations . In the Midlands and North Wales there have been large deposits of copper in limestone e.g Ecton and Llandudno , but this metal is nevertheless rarely found in similar rocks in South Wales and the Mendips . So far as I am aware it has not been noticed in the Forest limestone although there is a little Galena (lead ore) near Chepstow and Symonds Yat , if not elsewhere .

Turning now to that most unpromising stratum - the Old Red Sandstone, it is surprising to be able to record several inexplicable cases of sufficient copper being present actually to initiate mining operations .

Two of these were mentioned by Murchison in his Silurian System 1839, the first being at Haytonbent , north of Ludlow (Grid Ref 517810) At the time of his visit the works had been closed a hundred years but he was able to find specimens of green and grey copper ore in a matrix of calcite running in a small vein through the sandstone . Since then , the mine was reopened about 1870 without success . When I examined the site in 1964 samples of blue and green carbonates together with Galena were plainly in evidence , also several old shafts and adits .

Cont .

The second instance is at Talachuddu , near Brecon (O86345) where according to Murchison ' the strata consists of hard chocolate and greenish coloured sandstone with granular quartzes rock ' The veinstone thrown out from trial shafts (the works having been abandoned) contain much crystallised blend . This site is very interesting since the adit is still open , though narrow and confined . Some years ago , George Hall and I tried to clear it through to the lode but the task proved too great at the time . However , a considerable amount of well mineralized material including copper pyrites could be found on the waste tips , several well known universities have analysed the contents but without much agreement on results . To be able to inspect this lode in situ would constitute a very laudable objective of scientific value , and not beyond the powers of the amateur miner .

The third example of copper in the Old Red occurs in County Waterford Ireland , and was recorded by De La Beche in his Geological Observer 1853 so that there is no lack of precedent . In none of these cases , by the way , are igneous rocks present .

The possibility of copper in the Forest (or even on the west side of the Wye) must therefore be considered a real one and I therefore believe we should be more reliably influenced by the factual written evidence of the Swedish visitors (who were actually there at the time) than by the notions of some modern geological theorist . It is of course very important to know exactly what the Swedes wrote in their report , and the question of whether copper imports to Chepstow (the port for Redbrook) began at the same time as the smelting works , or at a later period , is also important to the argument . I believe Alan is pursuing these lines of research - meanwhile , if anyone proposes to tramp the hills of Dean in search of copper , I shall be pleased to join him !

David Bick

April 1975 .

CHEPSTOW AREA

John Elliott

Further checking of speleological sites has been steadily progressing over the past few months . Some of the main sinks and risings around Itton and St Arvans have been looked at .

A St Peter's Cave had intrigued me , my only clue being some tales from two old GSS members and a grid reference I couldn't find . I knew (or thought) that it was located on the main Glos - Cardiff railway line in Chepstow . Some rather dodgy exploration of the aforementioned railway yielded no results . Finally the grid reference , Heather and I drove into the Bulwark estate and drove round its maze of roads in awe . Then , in desperation , we stopped and trooped across some waste land . Some children were playing so , trying to look casual , I sidled up to a little girl and asked her if she had seen a cave .

" You mean St Peter's cave " she replied . I jumped up in the air in excitement . " No I don't know where it is " I crumpled visibly . " My brother does though " and before I could say " Yours in a hole " she'd disappeared .

To our surprise , she returned with a young bearded lad dressed better than I . No he couldn't tell us where the cave was but he could take us there . So dimbing into Heather's rubbish laden car , we proceeded through the estate until we stopped in a wood . We climbed down a slippery muddy climb using trees as hand holds . This placed us some 25 ft vertically above the main Cardiff- Glos railway line . Heather refused to let go of her friendly tree so our well dressed friend and I finished the descent . He much faster than I .

Crossing the line , the cliffs descended steeply to the River Wye . A descending traverse which couldn't have been done in the slippery conditions without some roots and a couple of stinging nettles , led to an imposing cave entrance . Inside , the passage continued for 60 ft until atypical mud fill halted progress . A good size cave commanding a fine view of the River but unfortunately with little prospects .

Our lad was an interesting fellow - he pointed up the sheer cliffs and told us how he had climbed up these and , on reaching an overhang some 15 ft up , promptly fell 50 ft into the river . Fortunately , he said , the tide was out . He apparently explored all the caves in the Wye Valley and described the Lead Mine that George Gardiner had shown us . Also , he knew of Roman Gold workings (opencast) above Botany Bay up the valley . He had an A Level in Geology and was a keen photographer . Having retrieved Heather from her tree , we swapped addresses and tried to find our way through the estate and back to Chepstow . Christmas came and a well stuffed Phil Schwarz joined Heather and I for a walk around Maunton Brook . First we studied the rising and then looked for the sink . Water levels being very high , the sink wasn't visible as it is in the undergrowth into Maunton Village in an idealistic valley . While walking back by road we found a sink which does not seem to have been noted previously .

The next day we joined George and Fran from St Arvans and they showed us some very interesting sites locally and told us some interesting tales of local history . Spaky , who had been due a few hours earlier , arrived and during dinner we visited some cave in the Wynd Cliff with him . However he disappeared and miraculously reappeared in George's kitchen to be confronted by a cooked dinner . We finally ran him to ground .

The afternoon was spent chasing a reputed cave that Fran had heard of and we finally found it in a wood full of white limestone water - worn blocks . The cave hidden deep in the woods , has an impressive entrance but consists of a single chamber - its formation a mystery .

A cave system must exist from Maunton running out under the River Severn and a full report on this area can be seen in proceedings of the UBSS March 1970 . This done to find the source of the Great Spring which was hit when driving the Severn Railway Tunnel in 1874 . There remains , however , a lot of work for the caver in this area .

The other area now under close scrutiny is on the Glos side of the River Wye . Generally known as the Great Well , a large resurgence situated under the imposing Ran-yr-Gor rocks was once used as a source of supply to the Water Board who pumped water up the 500 ft cliffs . This area is not easy to reach but is rewarding in its remoteness and rugged scenery .

It could well pay off speleologically . Phil and I visited the Tintern Quarry which had recently exposed some cave entrance . All that remains is a well calcited chamber badly mutilated by the hungry Quarry Manager . Was it him who roared round the quarry in a yellow Land Rover every few minutes and frightened poor Phil ? Walking the area , some interesting sites were noted including a cave that has yet to be entered .

All sites are being recorded and the information will go into the Cave Registry . Other cavers are asked to grid reference any sites they find and to pass the information to the area registrar or direct to chief registrar Jim Hay .

THE MID - WALES MINING MUSEUM

DOUG MACLEAN

Next time you go to the Mid - Wales area , I would recommend the Mining Museum at Llywernog Silver Lead Mine as well worth a visit . The complex is situated on a four acre site just off the A44 Aberystwyth to Llanidloes mainroad . (OS 733809)

Among the many exhibits are three working water wheels and the last surviving example of a 'Round Buddle' in the Mid-Wales mining area where this process was invented .

Who's Who

Who poured brown ale in his caving boots and then caved without his socks ?

Who ought to take precautions ?

Who wouldn't rejoin the club until her husband said she could ?