

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN CAVING CLUB



NEWS LETTER

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CONTENTS

Page 1

Editorial

General News

Page 2

Trips

Resumé of Committee Meeting 12.12.78

Page 3

Resumé continued

Page 4 and 5

Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon

Editorial

There was quite a good response to my appeal for articles and I have a few promises which I hope will arrive on my desk. In the pipeline is an historical account of the chimney which is being restored at Perseverance Pit.

Also, Doug McClean is trying out some new (or old) photography techniques and has already got some good results from Bixlade Iron Mine. His business can't be doing too well as he's not using a flash gun. His next attempt will be the photographically challenging Honeycomb Rift in Westbury Brook. I await these results with interest.

General News

Paul Esser Memorial Lecture 1979. This is to be held on Wednesday, 23rd February, at 8.15p.m. in the Arthur Tyndall Memorial Theatre of the Physics Department, University of Bristol, Tyndall Road and will be delivered by John Liddell who will talk on white water canoeing in the Grand Canyon and Karakoram. The original speaker, Dr. Mike Jones, was drowned in the Karakoram expedition.

Our own club secretary was shaken but not stirred when he wrote off his Dormobile in the snow. Rotten show Ian!

Caving International Magazine

This is a new magazine for the world caving scene, published in English. It's to be a full colour glossy and I think it should be good. If we can get five subscribers, we can get a free issue for the Club library. Contact the Editor if you're interested, preferably as soon as possible. Cost will be about £4.40 for four issues in one year.

Digs

There doesn't seem to be an awful lot of digging going on, probably the fear of finding another Otter Hole and all the fuss involved! However, the Easter Dig from Dunn bottom landing seems to be creaking

back into action.

John Hine is re-opening operations in Clays Wood area and seems to reside either there or in the Butcher's Arms when he's down this way.

The dig at Ilanquilan, Chepstow, is down about 15ft. and looks quite good. However, help is needed so if you're interested, contact Colin Shapter who is working with the lads from Hades C.C.

The G.S.S. have been very busy in Coldwell Swallet and have made some promising extensions with good prospects for more. They are rumoured to have borrowed our Bailey chemical lumphammer, so anything can happen.

TRIPS

January and February 1979:

Saturday 13.1.79.	O.F.D.1
Wednesday 24.1.79	Lamb Leer
Thursday 1.2.79	Club Meeting - Slides on Thailand - Sally Fearn
Saturday 10.2.79	Aggen Allwedd
Wednesday 21.2.79	Eglwys Faen

Those interested please contact Colin Shapter. Any requests for trips also please contact Colin.

A resumé of the Committee meeting held on 12th December, 1978.

Present: J. Harvey, I. Calder, C. Shapter, J. Hay, J. Elliott, P. Capper, C. Bowen.

Apologies: P. Gladstone

Matters arising It was agreed that the Thursday Club meetings should start at 8.30 instead of the seemingly impossible time of 8.00. and that the Club business should not last longer than 30 mins.

Officers' reports Letters have been exchanged with reference to the Eye Valley being an area of outstanding natural beauty and with special reference to caving in this area. It seems doubtful whether such a designation will affect us in the Club.

We have had a letter to sign with regard to caving on the Lydney Park Estate, at the present time the Committee is considering this, find out more and express your views at the next Club meeting.

The Cambrian Caving Council newsletter is around again and the Editor and Librarian have copies. This very informative newsheet is well worth a read so tackle your friendly Librarian.

Jannie Jansen has been accepted by the Committee as a new junior member and has paid her sub. Have you?

The caving meets to date have not been well supported although Box Stone Mine promised to be the first Club trip of the year. Don't forget Jan. 13 to O? no really O.F.D.1.

The design for the ladder tester has reached Mr. Clark so we should soon be able to get on with testing our Club ladders.

We are unable to get naming discs for ladders, any offers see Jim. Also plastic containers for carbide would be welcome. New head bands for helmets are also on their way.

It was agreed to attempt to provide a monthly Newsletter and well done John for getting one out for December.

It was agreed that the relics should be closely inspected before being offered to the Gloucester Museum since they are in such a state that some of them would have little or no value. It was proposed that this inspection take place on a Wednesday in the near future.

A new lock, costing around £20, is to be fitted in Otter Hole and a key deposit of £5 will be required. It was also felt that the Otter Hole Sec. should always be a member of the Committee.

A.O.B.

The surveys of Otter Hole are out and being re-ordered, costing 25p, the profits will go to Cave Rescue.

The Meets Sec. agreed to make surveys available for Club trips.

Dr. Nigel (I can't spell his other name) is to give two talks/sessions on advanced first aid at the Butcher's on 16th and 23rd January.

The next Clubmeeting is on 4th January and the next committee meeting is on the 22nd Jan. at Newnham.

- Agenda: 1. Apologies 2. Minutes of last meeting and A.G.O.
 3. Matters arising 4. Officers reports 5. Lydney Park Estate
 6. Otter Hole 7. A.O.B.

Signed: Ian.

Cgof Craig-a-Ffynnon and Otter Hole have been hailed as the two most significant discoveries in Wales for many years, and inevitably, to the caving world they have become rivals.

What then are the facts in caving terms. Both are serious caving trips, needing a lot of stamina and both have serious rescue and flooding problems. C-a-F is at least double the length of Otter Hole and, if either cave is extended, and they will be, then trips to the end will be very arduous. Really it all boils down to the individual's personal likes and dislikes. If you like mud followed by what must be the best amount of calcite in the country, then it's Otter all the way. However, even fit cavers pay the price of a good look round.

I must admit, to cave in, I prefer C-a-F with its grander passages which you can traverse at the trot. Formations are not profuse but are of high quality and don't overpower the cave as in Otter.

The Rook and Fountain dig had been going for years and looked more like a mine. John Parker and Gwmbran C.C. members kept hitting the site eventually moving to a hole to the right which had started draughting in the 1976 drought. In November they were into an exciting amount of cave with the inevitable boulder choke. This very unstable mass was climbed and more cave. It was choke 2 that took the work and much determination.

On July 10th, 1977, it was cracked and a major extension made. More recently choke 4 yielded another staggering amount of cave.

On a dry September day last year Ian Calder, myself, Clive Westlake and a friend entered the cave for a trip to the new end. Crawls which sport a nasty dusk when wet, lead to a chamber the way out of which is generally small and aqueous (wet). This had to be drained and was what had originally stopped the draught. A muddy streamway is gained after a nice straw chamber, then choke 1, very unstable and still embraces the original ladder. Back into the stream and on through a low canal. To the left a flooded route leads to some large cave and this was the first time I'd seen it open. However, onward to a short squeeze then up 40ft. of ladder and into choke 2. I like boulder chokes and this was a master-piece of digging. Mostly body size, you wriggle and squirm upwards for 70ft. at last emerging into the side of a large passage. Descending steeply, one draws a quick breath for the straight tunnel that leads on is blocked by large gours some 15ft. wide. Keeping to the left they are easily passed, and from here the passage lowers to a few crawls and slippery squeezes but then suddenly it's big, over 100ft wide and dead straight. The Black space at the end is called the Hall of the Mountain King and this vast circular

chamber has huge stal's hanging in a gallery from the roof. Choke 3 is passed by 900ft of crawling and if you're in a wet suit you sweat.

The emergence is good. A long dead straight rift called the Severn Tunnel and covered in shiny selenite crystals. A major junction is reached, scene of the old camp site but the main way on is right into a larger passage which winds round to an impressively large choke. Choke 4 stopped progress for quite a while and Clive led cautiously through. It was certainly grotty and quite a long way. We descended the boulders into the large continuing passage and once more galloped off. I was feeling hungry and we had planned a coffee break. However we were approaching the plum of the system, a side passage which reputedly held the best helictites in Europe. They were superb some large and many as fine as strands of hair. Many clusters adorn the wall and viewing was with care only. On again led to choke 5 and three of us went onwards, leaving Clive to enter another side passage to look for water for a brew. The route to choke 5 was absolutely enormous with house-size boulders on the floor. Digging prospects are so good that Parker's scared to dig it.

A swift return as my tum was decompressing. A short ladder dropped us into the object of our visit - a side passage which was only 5,000ft long and we had to photograph. We galloped off after the coffee maker who, in turn, was looking for some water. Finally we caught him up and sat down to replenish lost energy. All too soon we must press on and this was along a tricky exbow which boasted a climb that couldn't be done. The trick seemed to be to throw oneself upwards and rely on finding a hold. Even Calder the Climber accepted a hand. Back in the stream passage, the way on was pleasant and it meandered on and on. There was plenty of superb selenite crystals to add a sparkle. A large chamber drew a halt but there was a way on. Tight- and I got stuck with some indignity! Short legs was the problem I decided as one had to thrutch through at the roof. The end came shortly after a complicated area of beddings and breakdown. This remote spot is nearing Ogof yr Darren Cilan and may yet connect. But all these caves are part of the massive Aggen Allwedd system and the mind boggles at future prospects but a cave of over 25 miles certainly seems possible.

We can only wait and see.

SUBS ARE DUE NOW ---- STILL ONLY £1.25
