

Forest of Dean Caving Club

Newsletter 135 *December 2008*

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Editorial – Malcolm White

Greetings everyone and a happy new year to you all. For my sins I am now the Newsletter Editor but I'm not going to make any massive changes to the format (at least not yet anyway). Obviously I'm going to make the usual plea for articles. Something else that is in the pipeline is a RFDC Journal so if any of you fancy seeing yourself in print and have any ideas for some decent length articles or have any photos (or both even), that you think should see the light of day then please drop me a line. One other thing that has been proposed is to write a history of the club. So if any of the long serving or original members have any memories of the "old days" that you think should be preserved then again let me know please.

Malcolm White
10 Westover Court
Churchdown
Glos GL3 2AA
01452 859202
malwhite@blueyonder.co.uk

Committee for 2009

Chairman	Greg Jones
Secretary	Sue Corston
Treasurer	Andy Clark
Librarian	Nicola Bayley
Tackle Office	Seb Hall
Newsletter Editor	Malcolm White
Meets Secretary	Dan Sandford
Other member	Nick Negus

Co-opted Positions

Club FODCCAG Reps	Dave Tuffley & John Hine
Wet Sink Secretary	Andy Clark
Otter Hole Secretary	John Hutchinson (of Hades CC)

RFDCC Web Page

www@rfdcc.org.uk

FOREST NEWS

Diary Dates – Dan Sandford

January - Sat 17th (or Sunday 18th - Whichever is more convenient) - **Ban-y-Gor**. Somewhere on the banks of the Wye. Tight in places, so be careful how much you eat over Christmas. Details to be confirmed. Contact me if interested.

February - Sat 21st or 22nd (Again, whichever is more convenient)- **Ogof Carno**. Near Clydach Gorge. Details to be confirmed. Contact me if interested.

February - 11th Wed. night trip to **Whittington stone mines**, nr Cheltenham. To be Confirmed.

Mid- March - **Mendip weekend** - Again not sure date, as I am sorting out a leaders trip for **Upper Flood**, and we will work around them. Also planning have trips to: **Rhino Rift, Eastwater, Swildon's Round Trip** on the same w/e - or anything else people fancy on Mendip. To be Confirmed.

Contact Dan Sandford for full details

Old-Ham Retro Trip 2008 – Greg Jones

This year's retro trip, where electricity is banned, was not as well attended as 2007's; but a good crew turned up all the same. There were a few new faces along, which was nice; and we enjoyed a very leisurely wander to Railway Churn and back, going to via Football Roof and from by way of the Sword of Damocles. This year, in addition to the usual Stinkies, nellies and home-made lamps, we had a Tilley lamp; which proved itself to be not-at-all suitable for underground exploration. Well-done Glenys for bringing it along, it was most entertaining.

After the trip we retreated to the Rising Sun for our annual get-together with the GSS.

Brown's Folly Trip Dec 2008 – Malcolm White

Monday the 29th saw the annual trip organized by John Hine to the freestone quarries near Bath. A very respectable turn out this year with 20 cavers attending, not all from RFDCC. Greeting us in the car park was a small inflatable doll which brought back memories of the old entrance to Oakwood Mill Deep. We split into three parties and made our separate ways round the quarry.

Unsurprisingly as the place isn't huge we kept bumping into the other parties, at one point catching up with John "I need no survey" Hine's party. We stopped for a bite to eat and then met them coming back the other way about 15 minutes later. He said he knew where he was going and who am I to argue. Someone kept holding our party up playing with their new digital camera. After one frustrating hold up Mike Sims mentioned that I'd have a lot more success if I pointed the flash gun in the roughly the same direction as the camera (Oops).

Old Ham Surveying – John Hine

Earlier in the year, due to Paul Taylor being stranded on a trip with no one to go with, he joined us on a trip into Old Ham to sort out a few navigational problems on the White Cross Route. This is a high level route from Old Ham to Dun Pit Mine Work, a now blocked entrance which I believe to be the original "walk in" to what is now New Dun, to the start of the Lambsquay Gale.

Since Paul was unaware of this route he suggested it ought to be surveyed as part of the Forest Master Survey. I was interested in how a new survey compared with the survey of Tomas Sopwith in 1835 and with the "loose needle survey" carried out underground by William Fryer (his initials and those of his assistants together with the date can be found underground).

To save time and effort surveying started at both ends from two of Tony Days' survey points (1964 – 1970) and was also tied in with the survey done from Old Ham to Lambsquay and on to Old Bow carried out by Ian Standing and Di Court in 1972.

The underground surveying is almost completed; a surface survey is yet to be done to hopefully tie up loose ends. Over to Paul for the final product when ready!

From the Coal Authority – Incident Alert

Shortly after entering a former coal mine on Friday July 18th 2008 a man became unconscious due to lack of oxygen in the atmosphere. Although the emergency services rescued him tragically he died in hospital on Sunday 20th July 2008.

Former coal mines with the associated shafts and adits are inherently dangerous environments and entry to these places should be totally avoided.

Mine workings often contain atmospheres which have very little oxygen and, if encountering such, will kill people very quickly after entering. Mines could also contain flammable gas which could explode causing tragic consequences to anyone within the mine workings.

There are numerous other hazards associated with old mines, including collapses of ground and the Coal Authority emphasises that these places are extremely dangerous and should be avoided at all times.

The Coal Authority is the public body which deals with surface hazards arising from past coal mining activities, such as collapses, open mine entries, water and gas emissions from mines and spontaneous combustion of coal. Our emergency callout service deals with these incidents on a 24 hour basis every day of the year. Upon receiving a report of a coal mining hazard we will arrange for the situation to be made safe and remediate those hazards for which we have responsibility.

The Coal Authority has asked NAHMO members to report any open coal mine entrances they may find as part of their mining research work. The report should be made to the emergency telephone response service given below. The line is manned 24 hours a day.

To report a surface hazard Tel 01623 646 333

The Coal Authority, 200 Lichfield Lane, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG18 4RG

FODCCAG NEWS – John Hine

FODCCAG BGM

Thurs 12th March at GCRG Depot, 7:30 for 8pm.

This is your opportunity to find out what has been going on, to criticize us and for us to criticize you!

FODCCAG/FC Agreements

Prior to our annual meeting this year, FODCCAG proposed updating our Access Agreement, Management Licence and Dig Registration forms with the FC. Our proposals were favourably received but not yet finalized.

In view of the incident report from the Coal Authority, above, it should be noted by all that coal mines are NOT included in our agreement with the FC.

Wetsink Sewage Pollution

As some of you will be aware, there have been many instances of sewage pollution both on the surface above Wetsink and also underground, earlier in the year. The cause was failure of one of the pumps at Joyford Pumping Station, the responsibility of Welsh Water.

Thanks to the help of the Monmouth MP, David Davies, and Forest of Dean MP, Mark Harper, who involved the Director of the Environment Agency Wales, the replacement of the pumps, albeit longwinded, was speeded up together with improved telemetry and we hope there will be no repetition of the many incidents this year.

We would request all visitors to Wetsink to check if the sewage overflow pipe, which feeds into Drysink and thence the cave, is NOT flowing. If it is please ring the Environment Agency Wales hotline 0800 807060, and also notify me so that I can then chase the event up. Photographs of the flow and detritus underground would also be gratefully received, but not by email, as I am only on dial up!

BCA Insurance for Minors

At last year's RFDCC AGM the question was raised as to whether those under 18 needed insurance to satisfy our many access agreements, which are usually based on participants having such cover, and whether such cover existed for minors.

At the annual FODCCAG/FC meeting last year this question was raised with the Deputy Gaveller and whether it was applicable to our agreement. He decreed that all participants of our agreement needed to have £2 million Public Liability Insurance regardless of age.

Enquiries were made of the BCA and eventually they agreed that such cover could come under the "student" category of membership at half the adult price. The following details are from the BCA web page:

"Club Individual Membership of BCA"

- £16 Active cover
- £8 Student cover (in full time education or under 18)
- £5 Non cover
- £0 Cover with pre-paid BCA DIM insurance or UK cover with other appropriate insurance.

Nenthead Dates 2009

(The longest explorable mine complex in the country)

Bunkhouse accommodation is £13 per night

Easter, Friday 10th April to Sunday 19th April

1 week at the end of July/beginning of August, date to be confirmed

1 week towards the end of October, date to be confirmed.

If interested contact Mole

It Shouldn't Happen to a Caver

(An occasional series)

This happened to me in Eastwater Cavern near Priddy in the late 80s. Eastwater for those who haven't been there has a rather unstable boulder ruckle just inside the entrance, the path through which is shown by a guide rope. Rope is perhaps rather too strong a term for what was in place then, washing line is somewhat more accurate. Anyway it served its purpose and guided us through to a ledge at the top of the Dining Chamber. As I was leading the party I started to climb down from this ledge. Now those who know me know that my climbing ability is second to none i.e. I don't have any, I am possibly the worst climber in the club, in fact I get scared standing on a table. So there I am on this climb and I feel myself starting to slip. "Catch hold of my hand." said the young lady who was later to become my wife. Even though I was not the substantial person I am today I knew that I weighed considerably more than she did so I gallantly declined her help and searching rapidly around caught hold of the "rope" that had led us through the boulders. Amazingly it held my weight and so I was able to lower myself down the remaining dizzying 9 inches to the floor.

From the Archives

From 10 years ago

The Nicker "Knicked"

Although this story is not fresh it is worth retelling for the newsletters sake. Croydon Caving Club and others had the misfortune to have vehicles broken into and quite an amount of club kit and personal items stolen. These incidents were at or around Ystradfellte where they have their hut. University of Kent Troglodytes (UKT) experienced the loss of over £2000 worth of kit on one occasion. Croydon decided that they were getting a little pee'd off with this and arranged to lay a trap for the person(s) committing these offences.

A car was placed invitingly in a local but remote carpark. Inside were placed "goodies" to act as bait, such as rucksacks, personal kit and the like. A hide was prebuilt over watching the baited car and a team set watch. Eventually an old Citroen appeared and parked near the baited car, a man got out and after making sure no one was about (he thought), started to break into the Croydon Car. Using a telephoto lens, shots were taken of the break in and of the man committing the crime.

Bursting from their hide the Croydon Lads tried to do a citizens arrest on the thief but he managed to drive away. (I understand he was using a MACHETE to break in with Gulp!!). However the thief's car registration was noted and the constabulary informed, who made an arrest several hours later.

The thief had perpetrated a series of such crimes over several years and had hoarded a stash of kit worth an estimated £50,000! An appearance in court has not yet happened although the thief plus other accomplices were formally charged with several offences. The Police on the other had have enough equipment to start a Welsh branch of Caving Supplies and are anxious to hear from anyone who has had equipment lost or stolen in the area. A large pat on the back to Croydon and its "specials" who have saved cavers and others from the misdeeds of thieves. Lets hope this will serve as a warning to others.