

The Isle of Skye, Easter 1973.

The third visit by MSG members to the Beinn an Dubhaich region, the first two being in April and September 1971. A full speleological report on the work done and areas covered will appear in the near future. Meanwhile a brief account will suffice.

Personnel involved were Nev Andrews and PFR, as the "exploration and surveying team", Meg Mellors, Pru Johnson and Carol Parker. As usual, others had intended to come, but had not - Colin had been spirited away on a goodwill journey to the Continent with a flock of schoolchildren etc. etc. Expedition transport consisted of Pru's and PFR's vehicles - both of which, contrary to general expectation, completed the journey without incident. A brief day-by-day blow-by-blow account of caving, weather conditions, etc. follows:-

Thursday 19th April

Arrived at the traditional campsite on the beach at Camas Malag at about 7.30, after 13 hours of driving. Inclement weather, wild and windy night.

Friday 20th April

Weather "changeable" to say the least. In the morning met George a geology student engaged in mapping the Beinn an Dubhaich area - an invaluable encounter, since we were informed where the caves on the N side of the hill were. In the afternoon we went for a preliminary ramble over that part of the area, with George, and were shown a multiplicity of cave entrances. PFR (in 'non-caving' gear) explored the 70' long Slit Cave, and got wet and muddy. The roomy and dry Uamh an T-Sill (where we were informed a small party of GSG members had found human remains the previous week) was also visited. The evening and night were again wild, wet and windy, and the tents began to suffer from snapped guys etc.

Saturday 21st April

In the morning found more hospitable accommodation - a caravan at Kilbride House, and cheerfully vacated wind blasted camp site. After moving and resettling, went up on to N side of Beinn an Dubhaich, and surveyed Uamh an T-Sill (200' long, 32' deep). Then moved about 1/2 mile to the W, and went down a hole seen the previous afternoon, right on the granite/limestone contact - NA managed to bypass both PFR and the low section by a tight roof ox-bow, and the low section was then dug out to allow PFR to pass, as far as another squeeze about 40' on - from here NA went on alone, to the end - the passage shut down to a 6" wide rift. On the return journey, a grade 3 survey was carried out - total length 210', depth perhaps c.40'. Named Uamh an T-Shelf.

Easter Sunday 22nd April

Fine weather at last. Church in morning, afternoon to Glen Brittle to attempt to find Crocan Cave, an unusual sea cave mentioned in CRG newsletters of about 20 years ago. Searched the cliffs for 2 miles or so, no cave found - where is it? Magnificent scenery and views of the Cullin.

Monday 23rd April

Up the Allt nan Leac valley in the morning, and found Upper Valley Head Cave, a new cave near the sink for Uamh Cinn Ghlinn (Valley Head Cave) which had been found the previous year. A 10' deep hole drops into the streamway, upstream a wet crawl to an exit at the stream sink itself - via a nasty duck. Downstream easier going to where the streamway almost sumps (there is a c.2" airspace and a draught - not attempted). Just back from this, a hole

in the roof was found, into a passage apparently not entered previously. Pushed along this in a downstream direction, passing over the sump, for 50' or so, very tight and sharp, but became too tight just where the stream could be heard again - so near and yet so far. Frustrated. Returned down valley, and relocated a hole PFR had dug at two years previously - now called Old Cave (or the Gaelic equivalent when we find it) - high in cliffs about 300yds. downvalley from Uamh Cinn Ghlinn. A short tight rift opens into a 6' high chamber, exits completely choked by fill, obviously part of something very ancient. Length 25'.

Observed in the distance what was assumed to be the womenfolk of the party bringing up the packed lunches - in hope of food, pursued them, to find that 'they' were in fact a party of Mendip cavers, thinking they were finding everything in the valley for the first time. Informed them that they were not - whereupon they departed. Meanwhile, Meg, Pru and Carol had descended on Uamh Sgeinne, proved the first l. fork, left unentered on the initial exploration in September 1971, to merely be a short ox-bow and re-opened the Top Entrance to the system.

In the afternoon PFR potted very slowly down the Allt nan Leac itself to the sea, checking numerous nooks and crannies, but finding nothing of importance.

Tuesday 24th April

In the morning a pace-and-compass survey of the many holes in the woods on the N side of Beinn an Dubhaich was commenced, and one or two short caves there explored. In the afternoon most of the party went to see Portree and the Storr, whilst PFR, having seen these before, continued wandering in the woods, and found one or two more small caves, and a stream that sank in its bed and did not reappear locally at all - half a mile of dry gorge. In the gorge a small hole was dug out and proved to lead into 20' of cave steeply descending to a chamber with a deep muddy pool directly beneath the surface stream bed. No way on.

Wednesday 25th April

NA and Meg departed in the early hours of the morning on the long drive south. The remainder of the party, after shopping in Broadford, returned yet again to Uamh and T-Sill, this time to take some photographs. Also in the morning, the stream sink at Uamh an Ard Achadh (High Pasture Cave - the 850' long cave found by a party from London the previous year) was fluoresceined.

In the afternoon, PFR and Carol had a trip down Uamh an Ard Achadh - a most impressive cave, having a roomy well decorated streamway up to 20' high, enlivened by an easy duck, a 12' waterfall to climb down and a few loose boulders. The cave ends in a boulder choke, quite final - probably correlatable with a major collapse area on the surface. Again, some photographs were taken. Emerging, a small hole in the woods nearby was checked, but proved to be thoroughly choked 12' down, and then the nearest sizeable rising was visited, just in time to see the fluorescein emerge after 7½ hours underground (distance about ½ mile).

In the evening Elgol was visited, and a magnificent stormy sunset behind the Cuillin seen.

Thursday 26th April

Returned south, an 11½ hour journey, visiting Bothwell Castle (Lanarkshire) en route.

Resulting from subsequent correspondence the London Group who found Uamh an Ard Achadh have sent us their results for us to publish with ours. Slow correspondence with GSG is still in progress. A full report with surveys on all our results in Skye may form part of Journal 7 or be published separately.

P.F. Ryder.

Devis Hole Survey

MSG parties have made some 10 forays into the complexities of Devis and the survey is well advanced. Most of the accessible level has been surveyed (about 4600 ft.) the main exception being the E. and S.E. branch levels. The dangerous parts of West Level extensively follow a widened natural rift and some 500 ft. of small natural passages occur near the end (2 foreheads at narrow natural fissures). This section was cautiously surveyed and no further visits are planned or recommended! In the main cavern area nearer the entrance some 3200 ft. of passage have been surveyed with perhaps 500 ft. still to be done on the E. side and 650 ft. surveyed on the W. side with perhaps a little more to come. With other natural oddments here and there Devis may reach the elusive target of 1 mile of intact natural passage. Of course, if one counts the natural passage that the miners converted into level the target is assured. N.B. The drum in the entrance crawl is still only 15 ins. diameter!

Kirkdale finale

MSG Journal 6 sees the publication of the Kirkdale survey. Resulting from this work, the popular rumours about through trips to Kirkby Moorside, and a discrepancy in a 19th century survey, some possible digs were identified. The first digging trip early last December (DAY and GS) eliminated 2 of the prospects and a trip on the 8th June (IDW and GS) gained 4ft. of passage and eliminated the last prospect. Passages continue but appear to dip down below the fill level and the low passages are not conducive to major digs. In Journal 6 an additional footnote (by PFR) on the Kirkdale article suggests Kirkdale Cave formerly carried Hodge Beck (the nearby stream). Stuart Hodgson contests this and supports the Kirby Moorside theory claiming that a line of shakeholes used to stretch along this proposed route but have mostly been filled in by farmers.

Down South

The southern detachment of MSG have been active in some Magnesium limestone caves of their area. The famous Cresswell Crag caves on the Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire boundary were found to be rather more extensive than their reputation (and write-up in Caves of Derbyshire) would suggest (one was perhaps 500 - 1000 ft. long!). PFR has entered into correspondence with various bodies re access for survey work but the situation is complicated and may take some time despite optimistic beginnings. Near Cresswell, Langwith Cave has been explored and a sketch plan made. The length is about 100 ft. In the Conisborough/Warmsworth area, a disused railway cutting was found containing several cave entrances. Various rifts and small chambers were explored. Details of these will appear in Northern Caves!

In another disused railway cutting in Pleasley Vale several open holes were found and one entered a rift leading to a pitch. On a return visit this was descended for 15ft. and more rifts small chambers and descents found giving a total depth of about 85 ft.

MSG Journal 6

This is now available and full members will receive a copy with this newsletter. Associate members and others will receive an advertisement and order form. Get your copy NOW.

New Members

Since the last newsletter we welcome the following new members:- Ian Woods, Ivan Gibson, Alan Riles and Ernie Shield. We now have a four strong Newcastle contingent who may like to organise themselves and cave more regularly together. There are signs of growing interest in caving in the North East and the present set up of casual trips at short notice are not very helpful for novices who want to gain experience. Many of our current projects involve tight wet passages and are most unsuitable venues for new starts. I think the time draws near when we will have to lay aside some time for pre-arranged well publicised meets of larger numbers, particularly if we want to replenish our ranks. All recently joined members may wish to be reminded of the existence of Winterings our cottage near Gunnerside - Details from and bookings to Dave Atkings, 48 Trafalgar Terrace, Darlington.

Library

New members and old may wish to know of the existence of the MSG library. This has a good selection of other clubs' journals in it which are available for loan to members. In addition, I have quite a larger personal collection which may be borrowed by members. If you want to borrow by post (a list of what there is will be put in the next newsletter) let me know and I will send them. When you receive them note the cost of the postage and enclose that amount (in stamps) when you return them. In addition, I may be able to provide information on other topics e.g. caving equipment, techniques, etc., so if you want to know, drop me a line.

G. Stevens.

Other News

The 1973 National Speleological Conference will be held at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham on the 10th-16th September. After our resounding success with last year's exhibit we are hoping to make a good effort this year, preferably with more supporters. If you want to go contact GS and we will see what transport/accommodation is needed.

The response to the DCRO questionnaire has been insufficient to revitalise the organisation. We are presently exploring the possibility of the various fell rescue teams having a list of cavers for preliminary search/rescue in underground incidents. We would then use their organisation and call-out procedure. Failing this, it will just have to be accepted that parts of our area are essentially non-rescue areas.

Correspondence is in progress to determine the future of Fairy Holes, Weardale, at the hands of APCM. Presently some 2000 ft. have been quarried away. In the immediate future Boulder chamber will be removed (can you remove a chamber?)

but it is not yet clear what is planned in years to come.

Other Caving News

During a recent Winterings weekend, the caves of Swinnergill were explored and the Kirk and main cave were surveyed (again!) Rumour has it that the Grade 4/5 survey agreed almost perfectly with the old Grade 2/3 survey! PFR managed to divert all of Swinnergill into a sink near the caves so please correct your ordnance survey maps. In Gunnerside Gill both the shaft entrances to Sir Francis level were found to be blocked leaving the original entrance as the only access point. This, however, is gated and padlocked.

AH reports that earlier this year he found the entrance to Windegg level had collapsed; he dug it out and gained access but reports that it was extremely unsafe and likely to collapse again fairly soon.

SH has visited the GS dig in Lancaster Hole and is now enthusiastic about it. A return visit is needed - any volunteers?

YURT have found another link in the Fairbottom Series of caves near Birkwith. The cave is said to be over 200 ft. long.

Preston C.C. have made progress in Quaking Pot. The rift at the old bottom, previously thought to be too tight has yielded about 100ft. of passage and a further 200 ft. of depth to the head of a pitch.

ULSA have found two 15ft. deep pots on Mickle Fell

Fossils a Northern Dales Caver may encounter

Peter FR

The main drawback in presenting a brief description of the common fossils a caver is likely to encounter in the Northern Dales, in a newsletter such as this, is the lack of facility for providing reasonable illustrations - scratchy semi-legible diagrams on the stencils (an MSG tradition of old) this time not having been attempted. The interested reader is referred to the many palaeontological texts available, notably the booklets produced by the British Museum (Natural History) - "British Palaeozoic Fossils" and "British Mesozoic Fossils" will be the most useful.

Fossils encountered by the caver will of course predominantly be in limestones, since most caves are - thus restricting the initial range of environments in which the organisms lived to those within warm calcareous seas, generally of shallow depth as found on continental shelves and similarly shallow areas parts of the tropics today.

The most common fossils seen in Carboniferous Limestone in the Northern Dales are probably corals, brachiopods, and crinoids. Both Main and Undersett Limestones of the Yoredale Series contain bands of solitary rugose corals (Coelenterata), generally *Dibunophyllum*. On exposed rock surfaces, these commonly appear as small discs or ovals, often $\frac{1}{2}$ " - 1" diameter, showing a marked radial structure (which crinoid ossicles do not). Compound, as opposed to solitary corals, show a much more social approach to life, with many of the tubular individuals (corallites) in close contact - the corals well seen in Devis Hole (Lithostrotion?) - I have not yet had an opportunity to examine a specimen closely) and Keld Heads (probably *Lonsdaelia*) are of this type.

Brachiopods (not molluscs, which are lamellibranchs and quite a separate family) are a group of shelled marine animals very important in the Carboniferous, but much less so at the present day. The usual form seen in the Yoredale Limestones is the prominent *Gigantoproductus* - up to 9" across, especially abundant in the Middle (West Scrafton Pot and Smarber Beck Head) Limestone, which in the Alston Block was termed, by the miners, the 'Cockleshell Limestone' due to the abundance of these fossils (note that cockle shells are actually lamellibranchs, and thus cannot really be compared with gigantoproductids - thus reflecting rather sadly on the palaeontological knowledge of the miners). Smaller brachiopods are locally abundant, especially in the more sandy facies of the Main Limestone in Lower Swaledale (e.g. Whitcliffe Scar, and Slea Gill).

Crinoids (Echinodermata, related to the modern sea urchins) are usually represented by their stem ossicles, the stems in life supporting a cup-shaped body largely composed of mouth, surrounded by five tentacle-like arms (body and arms together being commonly and superbly logically referred to as the 'head'). These 'heads', being very fragile, are rarely found fossil, but the stem ossicles, and whole sections of stem, are in places so abundant as to comprise the bulk of the limestone, as at Barton Quarry (Main Limestone) 6 miles SW of Darlington. Crinoid ossicle may be anything up to 1" in diameter, but are most frequently rather less than half this diameter. The fossil ossicles are generally composed of calcite and where preserved in shales, tend to weather free, and lie around as small discs, often with a hole in the middle, somewhat resembling a modern sweetmeat. These are more lyrically and traditionally referred to in the North as "St. Cuthbert's Beads".

Fossils other than corals, brachiopods and crinoids are less common in the Carboniferous limestones, but may be more frequent in other beds, notably shales. If one is fortunate gastropods and cephalopods may be found, gastropods usually having conically and spirally coiled shells (c.f. the garden snail, the whelk, the periwinkle, etc.), and cephalopods shells coiled in a flat spiral (modern examples will be unfamiliar, but most people have seen the Mesozoic ammonite which is of this family). Carboniferous cephalopods are in fact early ancestors of the later ammonites. Both cephalopods and gastropods do occur in limestone in the Dogber Tarn area, above Brough (this is the Melmerby Scar Limestone at the base of the Yoredales). Cephalopods, both belemnites and ammonites, which can be assailed with impunity by hammerers and chissellers, are found much more abundantly in the Jurassic (Mesozoic) strata of the North York Moors area. The classic fossil collecting localities here are along the coast, in shales and sandstones, but limestones do occur inland, and with them caves. I have seen large (over 9" diameter) ammonites in both Fadmoor Cave 1 and Ashberry Windypit. In the Hutton-le-Hole area (Dowson Pot and Lingmoor Cave) gastropods are very abundant in the colitic limestone.

Whilst fossil collecting, if taken seriously, can be an interesting exercise, the specimens (even when relegated to use as paper weights and door stops) possessing considerable aesthetic appeal, the moral weight of hacking prominent fossils from cave walls etc. must be akin to that of the enormity of stalactite removal, so please be environmentally minded.

If any member does come by interesting fossils which they cannot identify, I would be pleased to be of what service I can.

Items for the next newsletter are invited and will be much welcomed. Send your contributions to G. Stevens, 4 Kingston Ave., Acklam, Middlesbrough, Teesside, TS5 7RS. (M'bro 83052)