

MOLDYWARPS SPELEOLOGICAL GROUP

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 1970

Various items of news prompt the typing of this newsletter - the third this year (a record).

Item 1 - the BSA conference - went down very well, and was enjoyed by all who attended. Lectures were most interesting, and we had our own display stall, which went off fairly enough. Optimistic hopes that we would sell many £ worth of Journals and surveys were unfounded, but a few went - plenty of copies of Journal III and the Ayleburn and Smeltmill surveys still to be sold, if you, dear reader, haven't already purchased copies.

Item 2 - the third MSG annual dinner - went down very well, on Sept. 26th September, about 25 people attended, with, as well as warps and associates, representatives of Grampian Speleological Group, NPC and YURT. Brian Heys' slides of the initial explorations of several Northern Dales systems were excellent, with many of Silverband Mine Caverns and Fairy Hole, places now alas lost.

Item 3 - Recent MSG work. The fruitful period of new explorations goes on and on! Gunnarside Gill has yielded Foxglove Pot and Eweleap West Cave, both small, but very interesting speleogeomorphologically.

Kisdon Cave has been abandoned for the time being, but on the day of its abandonment, the returning party found Keldheads Cave, near Preston-under-Scar, Wensleydale - a very little known, but not 'new' cave, c.300' long. A close inspection of this hole, fortunately very near a road, revealed a promising dig, which after half an hour's work yielded the biggest MSG breakthrough so far this year - probably over 1000' of new passage. Unfortunately it's rather rough going - mostly hands-and-knees over a sharp floor, but not quite as bad as E---r B---k H---d Cave, which, shamefully, no-one has returned too yet.

At Houghton-Le-Spring, an evening trip on 25-8-70 revealed a series of fascinating slip features on the crest of the Magnesian Limestone escarpment, akin to the North Yorkshire Windypits. There are several open holes of some depth, all frighteningly loose. Descents of two were essayed, for the first 20' or so, but quickly abandoned. The deepest of all - possibly 150' - looks as if it might be worthwhile carefully attempting a descent - although still very shaky.

Back in the Dales, a look at Apedale revealed a possible sink for Keldheads, three and a half miles from that resurgence, with nearby an interesting natural rift in old mine workings, so far unexplored... On the south side of the road at Hollow Mill Cross (Tailbrigg), Fells End Pot was descended - this is one of the deeper pots in the Main Lmst, 120' deep (certainly not 150' as a CPC Journal states).

One of those holes we've had up our sleeve (for a new master cave when the time was ripe to produce one), Cross Pot, Swindale, has had Graham S. inserted in it, and proved to end a full 5' beyond our previous limit of penetration in a 3" square hole thoroughly blocked by an ancient decaying wellington boot. Dead sheep in plastic bags in the open pot make a soft landing for people who fall or jump off the final climb. A marathon (2 hour) excavation by the combined forces of MSG and YURT (i.e. the writer and Martin) failed to re-open the collapsed Devis Hole Mine in Cogden Gill. Faggersgill has been receiving some attention as well, mostly from the living room window of Pete S's mansion there. So has the top of Great Dun Fell (Colin), where an elusive hole was located...

Ayleburn Mine Cave Extension has at last been photographed (Colin).
..... and then, there's the new system on Anonymous Fell, which will keep us busy through the winter months with exploration and survey. It is wise not to mention its location here (erst this document falls into hands or ears for which it was intended not) - for the very good reasons that we haven't finished exploring it yet, and it is reportedly extremely unsafe in parts. Enough said.

We will be occupied for quite some time .

Item 4 - The MSG Mine Exploration Group. This at last shows signs of getting under way, in the hands of Alan H. (now of Bede College, Durham) and new member Dave Carlisle (Town Head Lane, Austwick, Lancaster), who has already done a considerable amount of work in Swaledale Mines. With our base at Winterings, and Pete Stephenson's place in Faggersgill, we are ideally situated for Mine Research Work.

(I hear that one of the old mines at Nenthead is now virtually operating as a "show cave", with guides showing parties round, of course for a suitable fee. This also brings to mind Jan's story of a local caver taking novices on expeditions down Cross Pot II, of all places ϕ 120' long and 50' deep- a 5 minute trip for most), for the princely sum of 5/- per head. Anyone of a materialistic nature could easily accumulate funds ϕ for MSG of course) from such a source...

Item 5 - Surveys.

It is undoubtedly the prerogative of a caving club which discovers a new system to survey that system - this goes without saying, so it has been said. MSG have a full set of surveying equipment, sufficient to provide a Grade 5 survey of any system. We have just acquired a Suunto Clinometer, thus making the Abney Level redundant (which will cause few tears). Any caver other than the common-or-garden 'tripper' or 'sporting caver' ought to be able to survey, or at least take part in a surveying party. It is rumoured that in some caving clubs cavers discover new caves, publicise them, bask in the glory, and then forget about them, never doing a survey.

Then, in the years to come, no-one knows which parts of the cave have been explored previously or not. Geomorphologists know nothing of what the cave is really like, apart from some inarticulate description in an old club Journal. The C.R.O., when called out to rescue some unhappy party stuck down that particular hole, have no idea of the points of difficulty, easiest way in, type of passage they will have to take their equipment through etc. All through there being no survey....

In the 'early days' of Northern Dales Caving, some surveys were produced which may now need re-doing - rather primitive by modern standards. These surveys were carried out in tight wet and miserable caves by cavers without wetsuits, with notebooks they desperately tried to keep dry, prismatic compasses, which forever keep steaming up, and Abney levels. They took considerable effort. Today, many cavers have wet-suits, greatly offsetting the unpleasantness and danger of prolonged immersion in cold water. They have waterproof notepads which function equally well above or below water, and are a thousand times better than ordinary note paper. They have Suunto compasses, making bearing taking much easier and quicker (a better instrument for the cave surveyor could hardly have been devised). And now they even have Suunto clinometers! The fangs of the anti-surveying boggle have been drawn! (to Grade 5B). Surveys are fun! surveys are informative! Surveys are the fulfilment of a moral obligation to other speleologists.

The next MSG Journal will contain surveys of Eller Beck Head and Keldheads Cave as well as of the dry and easy stuff. All who partake in these undertakings will receive, true to MSG principles, a gleaming copy of the survey they have helped on for their wall. A truly satisfying thing to look on. A personal contribution to Speleology.

Help is needed

From YOU
thankyou.



The Tasmanian Branch

Phil (Nos) Robinson, a founder member of MSG, who served loyally from the first ever warptrip (Kisdon) to commencing the Eller Beck Head survey (please come home and finish it), has emigrated to Tasmania - and promptly started caving there. Follows excerpts from some of his letters, which are addressed 'Dear Moldys' -

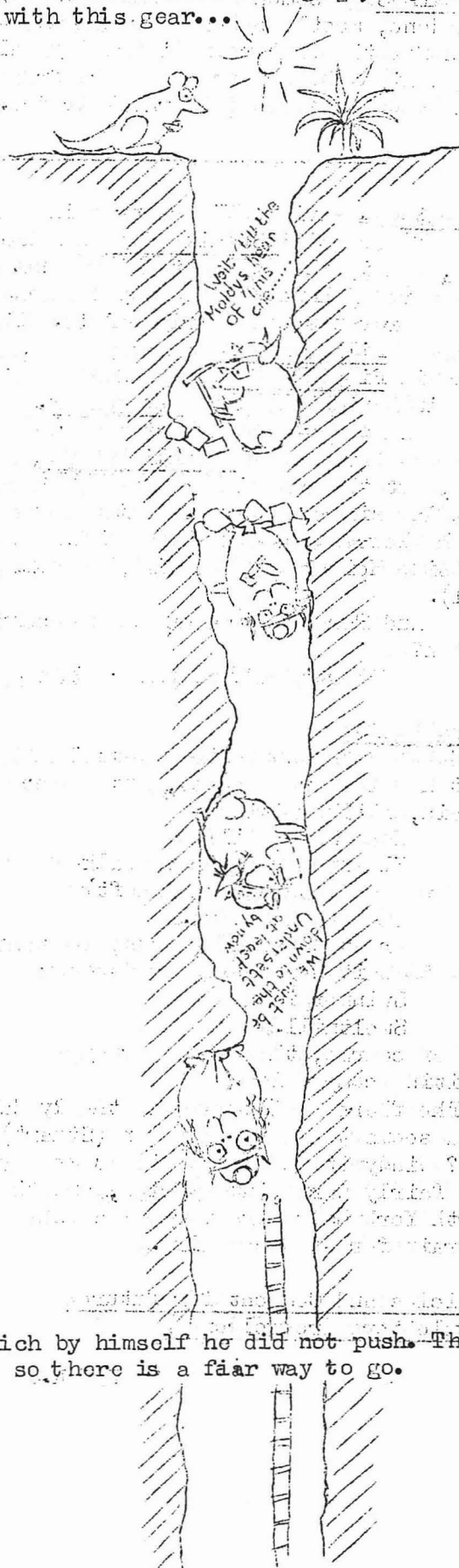
'The hazards here are getting to the caves through the Bush. The country is mountainous with thick vegetation. A big chopper and a chain saw are often essential. Normally we walk for several hours before coming to a cave. Track cutting into an area is common - lots of red tape is laid. If you stray from the track by only a few yards it is easy to be lost. Several people have disappeared in the past and not been found.

They (Tasmanian cavers) have no wet suits ! and use big carbide lamps. Remember Gel's big lamp - theirs are bigger and stronger. The light is good though. Accumulators are unknown, they have smaller electric lights, dry cells, for wet things. Wet pitches are a hazard with this gear...

..... I am fed up with trees at the moment, gum trees especially. There are just millions of them here covering all the hills. I would much prefer to walk up Trow Gill to G.C. with a big pack than spend an hour bush walking.

The prospects are so tremendous that it keeps you going. Last week we returned to J.F.X., the pot I mentioned in the last letter (a new find 2000' long and 250' deep, previously explored to a pitch where they ran out of tackle). The 50' drop turned out to be near 200' ! I was lined down and found a 60' drop to a ledge, a 12' climb, then down a 50' wet pitch to the bottom. The rock was grotty - rotten - and kept falling in small bits on top of me. The way on was too tight. I climbed back up 20', traversed onto a ledge, and found a further drop - 80' - to a pool, thus making it 180' at a guess. I was joined by Noel, a mainland caver, and we peered over feeling wet and miserable. Ladder was lowered and we prepared to descend. The rope was not long enough however and the chap lining 100' above us would not tie another rope on. Frustration !

It was impossible to line from the precarious ledge we were both on. We returned unhappily feeling very cold. Oh for my wet-suit ! Who did I sell my accumulator and wet-suit to? I am paying 6/- a trip for dry batteries and wearing dry grots. We returned on Sunday 4th October with all the club's ladder (320' only). 180' was thrown down the big shaft. Bill (the tallest caver in Australia at 6'7 $\frac{1}{2}$ ") and I descended 60'. There I lined him down the rest of the way. The trip was only to conquer this big pitch. It may have been 300' - we only thought it 50' initially. Luckily, 170' from the top he dropped into a pool of water and had bottomed it. A large chamber followed, then a flat tight wet crawl which by himself he did not push. Thus it goes on..... Depth of limestone is 1300' so there is a fair way to go.



There are many holes unexplored in this region. We descended two on Sunday as well. One was a 30' shaft, full of fallen trees believe it or not, which fissured out. Another hole went - a 12' drop leads to a walking passage, a 12' ladder pitch to a chamber, further sloping passage, a 20' pitch - then a big drop - 100' (?). It is dry, big, and draughting. Bill descended 30' to a ledge and estimated another drop of 50'. He also free climbed another 12' down in another direction to find a sloping crawl - and another 30' pitch. There are drops all over the place. We are 150' below the surface and still going strong in this one.....

(Further exploits of Messrs. Robinson and Co. will doubtless appear in future newsletters. I'm sure Phil would appreciate letters from any moldywarps - his address is Flat 5, 282 Sandy Bay Road, Hobart, Tasmania, Postcode 7005).

WINTERINGS - somehow remains with us. Some repair work and gardening has been done, mostly by the worthy JCL et al. The mice have moved back inside again for the winter (it is really only fair to ask them for half the rent)... Dave Atkins has returned intact from driving a bus around the Orient, and is home at weekends (48 Trafalgar Tce. Darlington)

Snippets - Evil YURT are treading grievously close to warpland with their find of the 1500' Summit Cave on Mallerstang, just on the west side of the road, and in the Undersett Limestone. Knowing Mallerstang (i.e. Jingling Sike Cave) I hope it's mostly low wet crawling.

Craven seems fairly quiet - CPC have added another 100' or so in depth to Pillar Holes on Newby Moss, another quarter mile of passage has been found in Pippikin Pot, and NSG have found a 95' deep half mile long through trip in Dentdale called Nettle Pot.

In the remote limestone areas north of the Lake District I hear that KCC have got through at Haltcliff Cave, where a river sinks to resurge 4 miles away, but the cave is so far 70' deep and 600' long. Another way-out area yielding sizeable caves. What about all the limestone in Northumberland north of the Newcastle-Carlisle gap? And the limestones of the Pennines north of Hartside Height (places like Loo Gill, and Croglin Water, and Scarrowmanwick Fell).

And Farlam Currick, and Watcher's Hill, and the high fells west of Alston?

"There's always the coming years, for those of us who will remain".

MEETS LISTS

Some of the suggested meets in the last newsletter have met, but others remain, still waiting -

Hard Level Gill.

Flushiemere (I have walked over the area and located the shaft)

Windmore End Cave.

Great Sleddale (I suppose that'll have to wait now until next summer)

Swinnergill.

Smeltmill.

And of course, those two surveys awaiting completion.

The flare of interest in the Ryedale area seems to have died down (Stuart) - why? Windypits could provide some dry and fairly warm winter trips, and the North York Moors are very pleasant terrain for surface walks.

Articles and Comment for future newsletters are welcome.

P F R.

