

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The last newsletter (Dec.1972) spoke of new subscription rates to be introduced at the AGM. Since we didn't hold an AGM, the new rates for 1973 are now fixed at 25p. for associate members and 75p. for full members. Associate members get newsletters + use of MSG library + miscellaneous perks. Full members get a free copy of the Journals as well. Journal 6 will be out very soon. Orders (or full subscriptions) to G.S. now. This newsletter demonstrates what incredibly good value for money MSG membership is. So non-payers be warned, if you don't cough up the subs. you may miss out on future episodes of our epic antics in the N. Dales.

SURVEYING & PROJECTS

On the surveying scene we have purchased a new Suunto compass so there is now no excuse for postponing or abandoning survey projects.

PFR is undertaking a study of the subterranean karst features of East Gill, Swinnergill, Gunnerside Gill and Hard Level Gill in connection with his course. Soon we should know all the answers. Where does Botcher Gill go? How did Kisdon Cave get there? Where did HLG Cave resurge?

SH continues his project, surveying the Arkengarthdale Mines. He hopes to produce a practical guide to the physical characteristics of the mines. Mining historians usually seem to enthuse about production statistics neglecting the features of mining that can be seen by exploration. I personally must confess to being rather baffled by many of the features seen down mines and would appreciate information that can be related to examples in places that can be explored.

Devis Hole survey is our major survey project at the moment - See below.

An MSG contingent is visiting Skye this Easter - read all about it in the next newsletter.

PERSONALIA

AH has now moved to Northamptonshire and C.C. will be moving to Exeter in September. On the credit side, PR (Noz) may be returning to this country later this year, where he is planning the first "Whaletail" descent of the Wintering's S.S.E.C. (For new members this stands for Super Severe Earth Closet). See his article below.

M. Stockwell's address was missing from the list of members in the last newsletter; his home address is 44 Station Road, Honley, Nr. HUDDERSFIELD HD7 2LL. He is the SUSS Hut warden so anyone requiring accommodation near Castleton should contact him, c/o SUSS. Two new members are Steve and Brian who live in Newcastle. Their exploits are described below. We also welcome Chris Pattison, a member of BUSS who lives in Darlington, Dave Croucher who is presently at Middleton St. George and Nev Andrews a member of BACC and ULSA.

CAVING NEWS

a) Northern Dales

Elpha Green Caves: Steve and Brian have made the first through trip from Feather End to the recess in the quarry face. They describe it as absolutely foul with bits of decayed chickens strewn about and the air and water somewhat odiferous. They conclude that the original continuation of this passage has been quarried away.

Elph Cleugh Cave was the scene of another epic in very cold weather. This time Chris Pattison led into the low wet crawl at the 'old' end. 3" of water in a 10" passage led to a squeeze (!) into a small chamber. Beyond the passage continued the same height but with 3" of air and would need digging to get into anyway. There was a slight in-draught at this point. On the way out the main in-draught was found branching L at a place previously noted as a shingle choke. A 2' high passage was followed to a squeeze which, after digging, was passed to about 140' of new passage quite high and roomy with 3 cascades and ending at a frustrating boulder choke. Fluorescein previously put in the sink above the cave was met here giving the passage its name Green Elf Passage - not to be confused with Elpha Green! The survey of all the cave appears in Journal 6 - order your copy now!

Keld Heads Cave The folly of publishing provisional surveys is now apparent. Keld Heads side passages have been on our action list for 2 years and on recent visits, N.A. and GS found about 5-600' of new passage. On the first visit the side passage near the 6" cascade previously entered by JDC was found by NA to continue for about 200'. He returned as he suspected he had entered known ground. This was very astute for he had in fact entered the passage leading off from Doubting Castle previously visited by GS having squeezed thro' the boulder fall that GS stopped at. This find significantly alters the picture of this part of the cave. As we had insufficient time for surveying, further probing was done downstream of Doubting Castle. While NA broke into a boulder chamber GS found a duck which bypassed the old "sump". The sump is in fact a rather desperate duck with a few inches of airspace. A streamway and several muddy passages were found, 2 ending in shattered boulder falls with roots growing through the walls and on mud banks. We would seem to be near the surface in the gully S of the cave entrance. The survey will reveal all!

Whitcliffe Scar Caves were visited by DR and GS and a 60' extension found in WSC 2. These caves are very reminiscent of Windypits and a survey is needed as they present some strange features. On the subject of Windypits GS found a new one in Gowerdale, 10' long and 3' deep! Motts hole was explored and does not require any tackle. This is another site in need of surveying (and extending?). On this visit in early January all 4 Windypits were exuding foggy clouds. The surface was frozen solid and the air was a bit hazy.

Devis Hole Devis Hole level ran in about 1965 and digging has taken place intermittently since then. PFR and MD started a shaft and this work was continued by PS, DC, CL, CC and AH. The shaft missed the level by a few inches. Last year PFR, MS and JH visited the shaft and found the level accessible but badly silted. They dug out some of the fill reaching a more substantial fall about 50' in. In February GS, DAY and DHC went to continue the dig and were amazed to find a howling draught and the fall breached by 2 old drums, the second of which is only 15" in diameter with some protruding bolts and an awkward rock that effectively prevent anyone of above average build from getting through. Once through, the main feature of interest to us is the natural caverns. These are really incredible in their complexity, 10 times worse than Windegg. Surveying has commenced and about 1000' completed to date. A circuit close to the perimeter was surveyed and left 56 enterable passages to be tied in. Not all the passage has been seen yet but the current estimate is at least 2000'. Like Windegg they are confined to a relatively small area. The caverns are not new discoveries, having been previously explored thoroughly prior to the collapse. We have

subsequently learned that DC and FMRG opened up the level. They point out and we confirm the highly dangerous state of the mine passages and timbers, not surprising in a 200 year old level. In addition, on the most recent visit the first part of the level after the drums seems to have been flooding severely in only medium wet weather, possibly cutting off the entrance crawl. These conditions are likely to promote further collapse so finishing the survey has high priority.

Stubbing Rigg Cave, Mallerstang, is a 500' long resurgence cave found by YURT. The water emerging sinks again to feed the Stubbing Rigg inlet in Summit Cave. (This latter has been surveyed for 1200' with about 500' still to go). SRC starts as a 40' flat-out wet crawl entering a joint-controlled walking size streamway with some stal and ends abruptly with the stream entering from a 2" bedding. Unenterable avens at this point are apparently directly below the sink which is 200' direct from the entrance. (GS observes that a factor of $2\frac{1}{2}$ in passage length/direct length seems very common, cf SMB and Washfold Cave). YURT Report III scheduled for July will have descriptions and surveys of these finds.

b) Others

Gingling Wet Sink has been extended by NPC. A new entrance has been found connecting with the old cave and some downstream extensions were found in dry weather. They present such a flood risk that exploration is inhibited.

NOW READ ON.....

There follow three short articles, one by PR and two by PFR, making this newsletter rival the previous record holder (Aug. 1967) (7 pages). However, as caving activity and article writing are at a low ebb the next newsletter may well be rather thin. Perhaps we ought to label what follows as part of the next newsletter to keep on schedule! May we make a plea for contributions. These can be factual, theoretical, even whimsical. How about 'My most bizarre Moldywarp experience' (from CC Moldywarp's Knock, New Year at Winterings), "Around the bend in Priorsdale" (from PH).

SEND YOUR ARTICLES, SUBSCRIPTIONS, JOURNAL 6 ORDERS TO GS NOW!

Virtually all deep potholing in Australia these days is done by single rope techniques. Abseiling and prussiking were introduced back in 1970 by certain Sydney "heavies" (as they are called by their local inferiors). This was mainly for expeditions to New Zealand, to the high alpine karst thereof. Unfortunately, mainland Australia has very few deep caves, "Odyssey" at -485' is the deepest. The rest are found in the small island of Tasmania. Khazad-dum at -1054' is no. 1 with 12 waterfalls. Durin's Bane is another entrance to the system with pitches of 70', 90', 180', 120' and 220'. This was fully explored on Jan 31st 1973 to provide a fantastic round trip. 2nd is Cauldron Pot, -802', also explored in January 1973, with 135', 50', 48', 36', 45' and 115' waterfalls. 3rd is Tassy Pot, -758' (140', 90', 243' pitches, dry).

The advantages of S.R.T. trips are obvious, speed, lack of effort in the way of manhandling gear, etc. Pitches become smaller. Just before I left Britain in 1970, the thought of handling a 200' free pitch on a single rope was crazy to me - now it is second nature. With adequate equipment and experience any length pitch can be managed. Ropes used here have been non-stretch terylene, sheather, spinnaker cord. This has two sheaths with approx. 5000 lb. breaking strain - it is infinitely better than ordinary nylon caving ropes. The American Blue Water is now becoming popular. At 7000 lb. breaking strain, low weight, strong sheath, negligible stretch etc. it is close to the ideal prussiking rope. Of course, rope protection on S.R.T. trips is highly important. Plastic tubing and canvas bags are used to avoid chapping and abrading over rock edges. Damage by ascending or descending devices is negligible compared to that from the limestone itself. For abseiling, "Whaletail" descenders, and/or rappel racks are used, the latter having a variable number of moving bars to control the speed of descent. The "Whaletail" is constructed from aluminium, and acts as a better heat sink, resulting in less wear.

For prussiking jumars are favoured. Most cavers have their own 'system' dependant on the pitch, e.g. whether it is a long free drop, or against the wall. I use an ascender box for 100'+ free drops, which keeps one very vertical. The "inchworm" system has a jumar strapped high on the chest, the chest and sit harness being combined. The second jumar is independant on slings to both feet. Many ideas were demonstrated at the Jan. 1973 Australian Speleo. Federation biennial conference in Sydney.

The next step is New Guinea - deepest cave in the southern hemisphere is Bibima Cave, -1620', at Kundiawa (explored mid-1972). World depth records are possible in this very mysterious part of the Commonwealth. Remoteness, expense, jungles and many other problems have to be surmounted. An Australia-New Zealand expedition is planned for August 1973.

Meanwhile I look forward to perhaps repeating some of the old Yorkshire classics by S.R.T. Juniper Gulf, Meregill and Gaping Ghyll main shaft? Jumaring / abseiling has certainly revived my interest in potholing again, or "vertical caving" as the Aussies call it.

There are three major, stratigraphically quite separate, areas of limestone strata in North East England. The Carboniferous limestones of the Pennines are the most important (both areally, economically, and from a caver's point of view). The second area is that of the Permian Magnesian Limestones, outcropping over a wide area in eastern County Durham (and forming all of the Durham coastline. The third limestone area, of more limited extent, is that of East Yorkshire - the Corallian limestones - read Journal 6 for more thoughts on this.

The Durham magnesian limestones have yielded a few caves, and rumours of more. Most of the caves so far known are small (e.g. Bluebell Wood Cave at Newton Aycliffe - 130' long), but local rumours tell of much larger ones. One story is of a subsidence somewhere near Seaham opening into a large natural passage which was followed for half a mile before opening onto the coast via a sea cave - now alas blocked by the tipping of industrial debris. Another (I have seen a newspaper cutting dealing with this) case was in the same area in 1955 (?) when a subsidence opened a 90' deep natural shaft into a large passage explored for a few hundred feet, terminating in massive collapses. So large natural caves do exist in this area - it's just a case of finding them. I have had a recent poke at sea caves at Blackhall Rocks, in the hope of finding evidence of "natural" (i.e. stream-cut or phreatic, as opposed to sea cut) passages - one cave does show some interesting development about 15' above beach level, although nothing can be followed very far. This is at approx N.Z.473390 - there are actually two caves here, the larger a series of passages riddling a small headland, seven entrances in all, about 475' of passage (yes we surveyed it). The smaller, a few yards further north, has a 15' diameter circular entrance 15' above the bottom of the cliff - most strange. Below this large orifice is a small cave entrance, at the cliff foot, leading to the base of a chimney up into the cave above. The 15' diameter entrance chamber closes down immediately to a passage at first 5' high and 2' wide, gradually descending and lowering, to suddenly end, 3' in height at this point, just over 100' from the entrance chamber, having dropped 11' in this distance. The regular cross-section of the passage suggests that it might be artificial - if so, who would cut a level in this strata (no mineralisation is apparent) in such an unusual place? However, one, undoubtedly natural, passage in the nearby larger cave, does show similar characteristics - some degree of development at a higher level than the majority of the cave, leading into a small passage running into the cliff - however, in this case, only 30' long.

An inspection of all sea caves in the Seaham area might be worthwhile for members who find themselves in this region. The sinks and risings in some of the Denes of the coastal area - e.g. Hawthorn and Castle Eden Denes - could also repay attention.

The limestones of the Jurassic succession in East Yorkshire outcrop mainly along the N side of, and at the W end of, the Vale of Pickering. North of this are the North York Moors and the Cleveland Hills - pleasant upland country, cut in sandstones and shales. There is something here of interest to the speleologist - a scatter of old ironstone and alum workings. At Christmas John Cooper and myself had a look at some old alum mines near Kettlewell - entered from a small terrace cut in the sea cliff, reached by a rather precarious scramble directly above a 100' sheer drop. The underground workings were not very extensive - a few hundred feet of roomy flat-roofed chambers and passages - but they were notable in the formations they contained - a bizarre selection, quite different from those found in the caves and old mines in the Dales - jet black stalactite curtains, pools of shining black crystals, brilliant oranges and reds in stal flows, 6' long straws - well worth a return trip to take photographs.

Another series of old mines - jet mines in this case - have been looked at near Aislaby - the entrances are at NZ81087 (approx). 450' of passage was surveyed here, an interesting interconnecting series of small levels and workings, with two entrances 80' apart, all quite dry and easy (apart from two pools of a little more than ankle depth).

Moving south into the area of the Corallian limestones and oolites, a couple of visits since the relevant sections of Journal 6 went to press deserve comment. At Kirkbymoorside, Manor Vale caves were revisited, and a third member of the group, worthy this time of the name "cave" was uncovered, in the County Council Yard rubbish tip, on the east side of the valley (at N.G.R. SE696862) (Caves i & ii, obvious entrances on the west side of the valley, are 15' and 8' long respectively). Cave iii consisted of a slide down a slope of odious debris into a 5' high passage of nice cross-section, very Kirkdalian in character, leading to a small cross joint aven, then lowering to a 1' high muddy bedding crawl to a second 8' high aven, with some nice (for E. Yorks) stal. Beyond the bedding was completely choked and stalled up. To the r., just at the foot of the entrance slope, was a low opening blocked by rocks, which could perhaps be dug - there seems to be some sort of passage continuing beyond. Total length of this cave is perhaps 50'.

The River Dove, flowing through Ravenswyke Park, 1 mile east of Kirkbymoorside, was also visited - the term 'flowing' is correct only after wet weather, it seems - the river bed was bone dry and partly grass grown. We walked upstream to find the river sinking in a pool at SE 708875, then down to Keld Head, at SE 710865, one of the most impressive risings I have seen anywhere - supposed to close down 10' in, but one can't verify this by standing on the bank peering in. Fru was wearing wellingtons, so we attempted to entice her in, but as the water is 4' deep we didn't succeed. A return visit, in dry conditions, with wet-suits, might not be wasted.

A short distance upstream from the rising, in a cliff on the W side of the dry river bed, we found the cave ("in Ravenswyke Park") mentioned by Hayes in the 'British Caver' as known to locals as 'Une Mouth' - an obvious 4' diameter circular entrance 15' above the river bed. This was dry, and was entered with enthusiasm. After 30' enthusiasm and passage size decreased considerably - the cave closed to a 4" bedding, and the party exited, feet first, rapidly, pursued by a large and hostile spider.

Inspection of all the valleys and gorges of this area would doubtless reveal some more small - or larger - caves. Inspection of the many small old quarries which dot the landscape might also prove fruitful - Fadmoor Caves are in such a quarry. Recently I was on a Geology field trip in the Scarborough area, and was engaged in mapping the outcrop of the Colite (- limestone) around Hackness, only four miles from Scarborough. In places minor solutional features were obvious, and in Silpho Quarry (N.G.R. SE958917 - reached by a cart track from the hamlet of Silpho, 1 mile N of Hackness, the 'old quarry' shown on the 1" map) found a small cave, here referred to, with characteristic originality, as Silpho Quarry Cave. The cave apparently consists of a low Fadmoor-type passage, perhaps 5' wide, much encumbered with clay banks and fallen slabs. Accessible length proved to be a mere 10', but from this point (in the light of a carbide lamp which was at the time emitting an oxy, or carboxy-acetylene type flame, having been fuelled with lemonade instead of water, which was not available locally) at least 15' of continuing passage could be seen. Two or three hours of excavation, with crowbar, trowel, and perhaps a rope to pull one slab out, would allow this to be accessible (and thus give one a recordable cave for the guidebook, the easternmost cave in the United Kingdom?), and possibly allow access to further passage.

A local guidebook mentions the River Derwent, in the Forge Valley (c. SE985865), as passing underground, at any rate in part, through 'swallow holes in the limestone' - this needs looking at.

Smeltmill Beck Cave - A problem answered, and some that are not.

- reading "Smeltmill Beck Cave - a few problems" in the MSG newsletter for January 1970, in a summary of the sinks feeding the cave, one comes to the following :

"the sinks along the plateau south-east of Smeltmill Beck - including quite a reasonable stream sink behind the Transport Cafe. It can fairly safely be said that these do not enter the cave".

- in the light of recent work I must rewrite the last sentence of the above quote, omitting the "not". A new inlet was found some months ago by Graham and Pete Holloway, on the r. of the streamway proceeding upstream. In their description (neither of them having been in the cave before) they mislocated this as being 300' upstream of Cairn Chamber (having misidentified Cairn Chamber, as a bend in the passage 250' downstream of its actual position, and despite the fact that Cairn Chamber is notable both for its nature as a chamber, and in its possession of a large and obvious ~~cain~~ cain). Initially it was hypothesised that the new inlet might be a 'short cut' to the Cascade Traverse area.

However, on the 16th of March, an evening trip by Graham and PFR saw the passage surveyed. The true position is exactly 50' upstream of Cairn Chamber, in the r. wall - a narrow rift running back parallel to the streamway (i.e. south-eastward), beyond Cairn Chamber corner, and running "off the edge" of the survey. The passage is at first a narrow crawl, with the stream in a very narrow fissure 4'-5' below the accessible section. The floor then steps up, and one crawls along in the stream, over a nicely gouged boulder, to the abrupt termination of the passage in a sump. Crouching in the 3' deep water, one can feel a very low continuation at floor level, not of negotiable size. This point is 150' from the main streamway.

The question arises, where does the inlet stream come from? The sinks behind the Transport Cafe provide the only answer - the passage has crossed under Smeltmill Beck, and cannot be derived from there. The passage does show fairly good development, but perhaps not as much as might have been expected considering the amount of water and the distance to the sinks. The sudden sumping is rather a surprise - one might have expected (or feared), considering the nature of the other parts of the cave, quite a few hundred feet of small twisting vadose streamway in the inlet.

What prospects of extension does S.B.C. still hold? The possible final figure of 10,000' of passage suggested in the 1970 newsletter is still a long way off - passage gained total now stands at c.6,400'.

Prospects remaining are :

(a) Shrimp Inlet - a constriction (mostly stal., but lump-hammer resistant stal.) needs chemical assistance to enable its removal. Beyond, crawlable passage continues - where to ? There could be a considerable length of passage here, probably "tight and nasty".

(b) Halloween Series - the far end of Handwrecker. - The "promising" r, branch proved to close down to nothing. The l. branch, however, has been thoroughly looked at only once, by Colin (who has now doubtless forgotten all about it) - so perhaps this could do with another inspection, and survey ?. There is a draught coming from somewhere round here. The sink is some distance away.

Thin waterproof cavers may enjoy this, especially ones who haven't been before.

(c) The High Level Inlet in the Rift - ("where exactly is it ? I've never been able to find it") - PFR, 1970 newsletter. I still haven't found it.

(d) New Passages in the Ducks - now appear somewhat unlikely - the main route through was checked by Graham and PFR on the recent visit, and nothing found. The apparent "side passage" on the survey isn't - it is merely a cross joint.

So our own S.B.C., friend-of-long-standing, still promises more passage, but it will not be found easily. The old days of walking miles along open streamways are gone - but the remaining 3,600' may fall to resolute hard men in the Group. Where are they?

