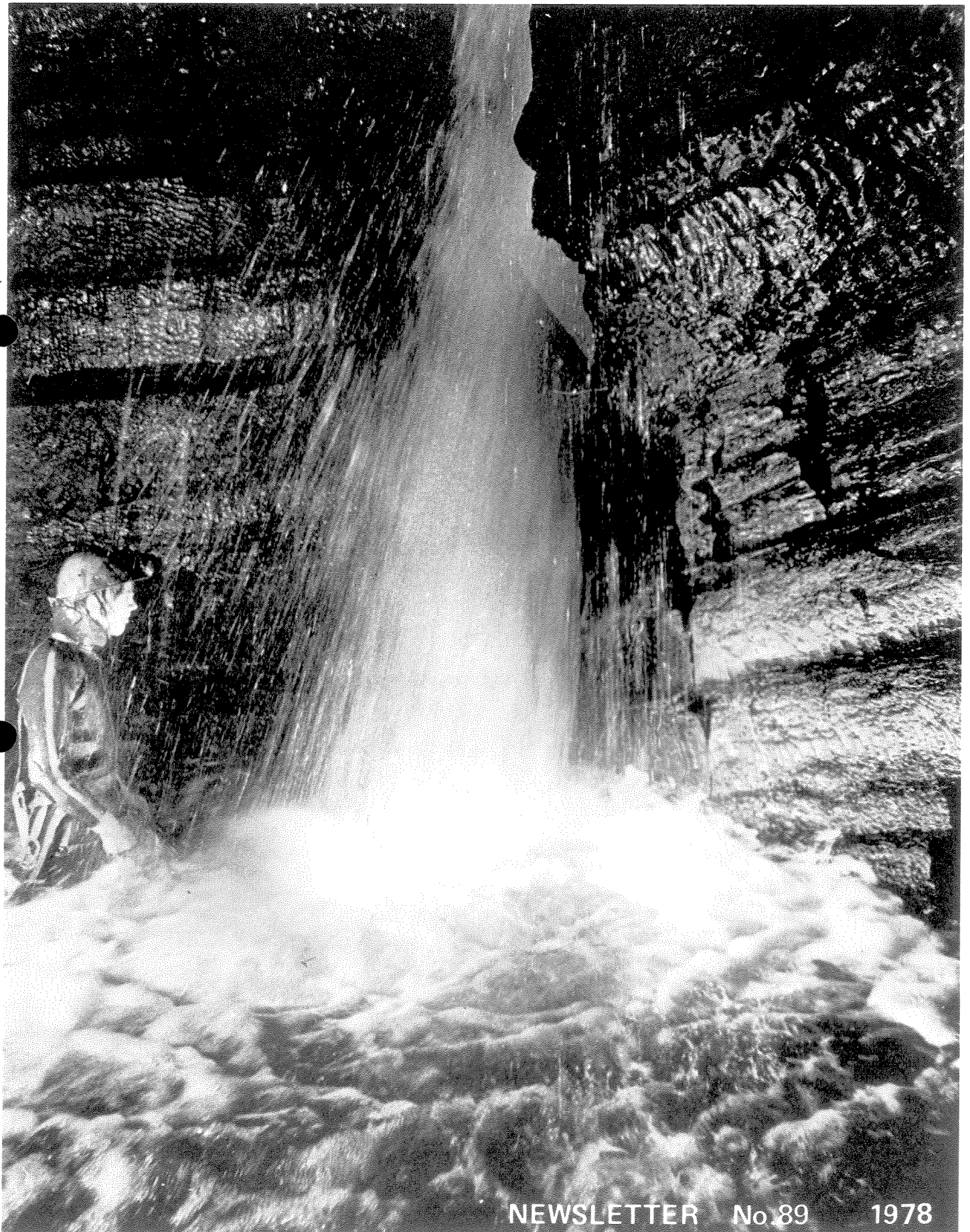


# SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB



NEWSLETTER No.89 1978

SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB

No.88

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JUNE 1978

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Colour supplement photograph - Ogof Ffynnon Ddu - Jem Rowlands.

Cover Photograph - Ogof Ffynnon Ddu .....Clive Westlake.

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## EXCAVATIONS AT OGOF YR ESGYRN

Ogof yr Esgyrn (Cave of the Bones) is the central and largest of the three small connecting caves in the cliff above Dan yr Ogof Show Caves and part of the Dan yr Ogof system. When excavated in 1923 by R.H.D'Elboux of the National Museum of Wales assisted by students of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, the cave was known as Yr Ogof (The Cave), sometimes as Yr Ogof Ganol (The Middle Cave) because it lies between Step Cave leading into it at the back and the shelter later known as Ogof yr Esgyrn East below and to the side of it, connecting with it but not yet penetrable. The farm below Yr Ogof was known as Dan yr Ogof (Under the Cave) and the show cave was named after the farm. With the opening up of the extensive Dan yr Ogof Caves the name of Yr Ogof was confusing and after the discovery of the skeletal remains, the owners suggested that it be known as Ogof yr Esgyrn.

Noises in Ogof yr Esgyrn can be heard in Ogof yr Esgyrn East while a small person can get from Step Cave into Ogof yr Esgyrn. I believe that the first person to penetrate this passage was Arthur Price of the Gwyn Arms, who as a boy climbed through it during the earlier days of the 1938-50 excavations. A round Stalagmite-coated tunnel, which brings water into the back of the cave on occasions and deposits it into a swallet hole in the floor of the cave has not yet been explored because of its small size. During the Easter 1977 dig the writer, while waiting for the arrival of the excavation team in the Bone Cave was surprised to hear inside the cave the distant sound of the recorded choir in Cathedral Cave, the sound obviously coming via rock fissures.

Apart from the hope of further Archaeological remains. Ogof yr Esgyrn offers possibilities of penetrating systems lying between the cave and Ogof yr Esgyrn East, between the cave and Cathedral Cave, between the cave and Dan yr Ogof and into the mountain at the rear via the tunnel. The prospects have been made easier by the removal of archaeological deposits in 1923 and 1938-50, so that cavers who assist with the current investigations have a two-fold interest - archaeological and exploratory.

Although R.H.D'Elboux made only two short visits to the cave with his students, the material they collected was representative of the large collection of objects recovered in 1938-50, and included human bones, parts of four bone pins, a Constantine 1st coin, a twisted silver ring, a bronze spiral finger ring and pottery, all of which was of Romano-British date except for one sherd of pottery, subsequently identified as belonging to the Bronze Age. D'Elboux's finds were enough to encourage a full scale dig and in 1938 on the suggestion of Gerard Platten and the owners of the caves, the writer, assisted by members of the Mendip Exploration Society and later its Welsh Branch undertook the work in co-operation with the National Museum of Wales. When the Welsh Branch of the Mendip Exploration Society subsequently became the South Wales Caving Club members continued to help in the work as they do at the present day. The work was done during weekends and holidays and even during the war years we managed to carry on, with a blackout screen for evening working. Some of us occasionally camped for the night in the wooden building with the verandah which now accommodates the shop. The building had been intended as a restaurant, but during the war it remained empty.

The first task in the cave was to clear the floor of loose boulders, during which the first find, a human lower jaw was made by Arthur Hill between the boulders in the area later known as the "grave" and marked by a white cross on the north wall of the cave. The survey of the cave and the division into square yards for the identification of finds was still in progress when Mr. (later Professor) W.F. Grimes MA, FSA, then assistant keeper of the Department of Archaeology of the National Museum of Wales arrived to carry out an examination of the site where the jaw had been found. This proved to be a pocket of sand 3'6" deep and occupying four of the yard squares into which the floor had been divided by the survey grid. It contained over 2,000 bones, all human except for a few sheep. Later bones were found elsewhere in the deposits of the cave, but nowhere was there any depth such as in the "grave" and often the soil was only 4" or less in depth.

An extensive bank of stalagmite sloped down from the ceiling of the east wall of the cave and at its lowest part, near the centre of the cave formed hollows holding soil. Bronze Age and Romano-British material was found in the soil and sometimes embedded in the underlying stalagmite. In the middle of the cave was a twin boss of stalagmite bare of earth.

As well as the remains of 40 individuals there were a number of brooches, coins and other articles, and it was clear that the single chamber which formed the cave had been both an occupational and a burial site, particularly in Romano-British times, although some Bronze Age Occupation was present. The periods represented were Middle Bronze Age III (c. 1050 BC to 850 BC) and the Romano-British (1st to 2nd centuries and 4th century AD). The coins, including the one found by D'Elboux were eleven in number and belonged to the periods of Vespasian, Trajan, Hadrian and Constantine I. The brooches were particularly fine and included five decorated bow brooches, an "omega" penannular brooch and the pin of a large brooch of similar type. Other items were a bronze penannular bracelet terminating in snakes' heads, a bone comb, bone pins, finger rings and an enamelled bronze strap terminal. These were probably all part of personal ornamentation which accompanied the bodies at burial, but the vast number of food bones and sherds of pottery indicated several occupations of the cave. There were two objects which one would not normally expect to be found with a cave community, a small balance arm graduated to weigh up to 20 librae (6.5 kg.) and a seal box. The balance arm had broken due to a flaw in its manufacture and had been repaired by joining the broken ends and strengthening the break by soldering thin sheets of bronze to cover the break. The arm should then have been re-calibrated but never was. The hinged lid of the round seal box could still be opened and closed and the box had a residue of wax in it. The seal box is a means of securing personal messages or despatches. The message is written by a stylus on the wax insets of a hinged wooden writing tablet. When the two leaves of the tablet are closed, the seal box is fixed over the gap and nailed through the holes in the base to the two leaves of the tablet. A cord is passed round the tablet and its ends through slots in the side of the box, which is then filled with wax and impressed with a signet ring before closing the box.

It is interesting to speculate why a community with these sophisticated things should have been reduced to such a miserable dwelling, or was this indeed a robbers' nest?

The Middle Bronze Age Items were few but interesting. They include one of the very few bronze dirks to be discovered in Wales. It was found point upwards in the fill of a rabbit burrow with the remains of a rabbit round its point. The rabbit burrow stopped abruptly at the dirk, so did the rabbit - an irony of fate that the dirk should prove lethal two thousand years or so after it had been abandoned. Another find was one of the earliest weaving combs found in Britain. the only other specimens found had been in Lesser Garth Cave and a less authenticated comb from St. Nicholas, Dorset, although in all probability belonging to the same age. The Bronze Age was also represented by the only gold article found in the cave, a double conical gold bead. As beads are small objects it could well be possible for other beads, not necessarily gold, to be found in the floor crevices. Bone and bronze awls were found and some appreciably large sherds from several Bronze Age urns.

Although the accessible occupation deposits had been removed from the cave by 1950, the writer was aware that there was a possibility of items being recovered from the floor crevices and being embedded in the stalagmite floor and central boss. There was also the possibility of objects having been washed to a greater depth in the swallet at the rear of the cave and in sandy pockets in the wall cavities. The first attack in the "mopping up" exercise was in the swallet at Easter 1976. It was extensively opened by members of the South Wales Caving Club, and a large piece of pottery recovered, probably belonging to one of the large vessels found during the 1938-50 excavations. It has been sent to the National Museum to see whether it can be matched with any of those pots. A small iron bowl was found but it is suspected that this may be modern perhaps the seating of a wooden button. However the large sherd of Bronze Age pottery justified opening the swallet.

This was continued during Easter 1977, with no further success. A concentrated effort was made on the central stalagmite boss. This had been partly broken up in 1950 producing Romano-British pottery under its 4" stalagmite crust, and as suspected, consisted of a pile of stalagmited rock fragments, probably piled up in Romano-British times. It was thought that the pile might contain something interesting and we concentrated on channelling round the boss and upturning it in readiness for a more thorough examination in Easter 1978. A short time before one of the team from South Wales Caving Club had recovered from the base of the boss part of a child's skull and a couple of loose teeth. Again this single find proved of considerable interest. It was forwarded by the National Museum of Wales to the British Museum, where it was examined by Rosemary Powers. A copy of her report is appended. From this it will be seen that she identified it on dental evidence as a child of just over 7 years of age at death. It will be noted that one of the loose teeth is of another individual barely adult, and the other was that of a young pig. Because of the large number of animal bones scattered about the cave, there is no real evidence that the pig's tooth has any connection with the child's burial, although it was a common practice, in iron and native Romano-British Times, to include pieces of pork in burials.

During the 1938-50 excavations in square T/f only 6 yards away on the other side of the boss were found the fragmentary remains of 4 Adults and at least 8 children, practically all parts of skulls

and jaws. The children's ages ranged from 6 - 8 years at death, but mostly from 6 - 7. In making her report Rosemary Powers had no knowledge of this previous discovery. The Celtic cult of the Head ( see Pagan Celtic Britain by Ann Ross) is well documented, and perhaps the evidence of Ogof yr Esgyrn should be examined in this connection, although so far as I am aware only adult skulls have been considered. I quote from my report in Archaeologia Cambrensis 1968 pp 28 - 29 "There may have been an ossuary or even cannibalistic practices associated with the Ogof yr Esgyrn Burials and, although I think it might be noted as a possibility, I feel it would be wrong in view of the shallowness of the soil, and the consequent exposure of the bones to various kinds of disturbances for the greater part of 2,000 years to rely too strongly on the position of the bones as found. The children were no doubt originally placed in the area covered by the square T/F, but whether as complete bodies or otherwise I would not like to draw conclusions on such an exposed site". However it will be interesting to find whether there are any other child remains within the stalagmite boss and the surrounding stalagmite spread which could be related to the skull The Easter 1978 dig should produce evidence if it exists.

For those interested in the growth of stalagmite Ogof yr Esgyrn might well repay study. The soft formations of the ceiling have already been studied in connection with the formation of "moon milk", but the floor development seems to be particularly fast and apparently still active. Romano - British pottery has appeared beneath the 4" crust of the central boss, so that the sealing of the rocks within it and the formation of the crust must be post Roman. One of the rotting planks left on the stalagmite bank of the east wall of the cave in 1950 and rocks piled on it were found in 1977 to be sealed by stalagmite. The rocks above the plank had to be forced apart because of the thin but tenacious sheets of stalagmite bridging them and the remains of the plank had to be levered out of the floor deposit. This point should be noted by the archaeological team, for the sealing of floor cracks does not rule out the presence of Romano-British or Bronze Age material.

The explorations of 1976, 1977 and future years have been made possible by the installation of improved lighting by Bill Little, the construction of a new seive by F.S.Baguley, and the tremendous help given by various members of the Souyh Wales Caving Club during the course of clearing boulders and excavation.

#### APPENDIX

REPORT ON SKULL FROM OGOF YR ESGYRN FOUND EASTER 1977  
Examined and reported on by Rosemary Powers, British Museum (N.H.)

When received for examination , the specimen was clearly the front part of an immature skull separated through the coronal and temporo-sphenoid sutures. The palate and right side of the face were obscured by a mass of pinkish-grey matrix. Some of it chipped away immediately and most of the rest separated on immersion in water, leaving very clear impressions of the teeth in a mould.

When cleaned the bone looked remarkably fresh, even for a Roman date. the teeth could now be examined. The four milk molars and the first permanent molars are in place and show very little wear. The crowns of the second permanent molars have formed in their crypts but are not ready for eruption. The anterior teeth (now missing) were the milk set except that the upper central incisors had newly erupted ( though the rounded base of their sockets suggests that their roots were not quite fully formed). This corresponds to a



dental age of just over 7 years. The nasal bones are missing. The only trace of pathology is a very small spot of "cribra" (osteoporosis) in the roof of each orbit. The metopic suture is closed.

Measurements are not really useful on so young an individual, but the following have been taken:-

Nasion bregma arc	120 mm.
" " chord	102 mm
Minimum frontal breadth	92 mm
Maximum frontal breadth	116 mm
Ma. nasal breadth	21 mm
Breadth at supr. nasal parts	15 mm
Nasal height	41.4 mm
Nasion-alveolar part	56 mm
Malar height	38 mm
Orbital height	32 mm
Orbital breadth	35 mm
Palate length	32 mm
Palate breadth at MI	31 mm

There are also two loose teeth which do not belong to the skull. One is pig, lower rt. p<sup>4</sup> (identified by Andy Carrant) the other human an upper left molar (M1 or M2), unworn and with root tips open (i.e. barely adult).

- References:
- Archaeologia Cambrensis (1924) pp 113-124
  - " " (1968) pp 18 - 71
  - Transactions of the Cave Research Group of Great Britain vol 13 No 1 pp 57-62 April 1971
  - Caves and Caving in Britain Edmund J. Mason (Robert Hale) 1977 pp 86 - 88
  - Portrait of the Brecon Beacons Edmund J. Mason (Robert Hale) 1975 pp 155 - 157
  - Guide Book to Dan yr Ogof Caves Dr. Alan Coase.

E.J.Mason

## A RAMBLING MAN

After one taste of the underground of the US and Mexico it did not take much to persuade me to return for more. I arrived in Jackson Mississippi in mid December and joined up with Wil Howie Jackson Harper, John Sevenair, and Charlie Townsend, all members of of the Southern Mississippi Grotto.

We spent three weeks doing the big pits of north Mexico, Taking in Pozo del Gavilan, 288 ft. Sotano de Huitzmolotitla, 365 ft. Sotano del Pozo 376 ft. Hoya de Guaguas 700 ft., and the one and only Sotano de las Golondrinas 1098 ft.

Without going into great detail about this epic pit, all that needs to be said is that a dropped stone falls for 12 seconds, it is a 70 minute abseil, 1 hour prusik in a shaft big enough to accomodate the Empire State Building, and you land in a floor of 6 acres.

After three weeks of Mexican food and living on the trails we were very happy to reach the civilisation of the US again. Jackson John and Charlie went back to their jobs, while Wil and I made plans to drive to Edmonton Alberta, taking in all the National Parks we could en route, en route, before heading for Mexico again in March, Hoping to do El Sotano, the 1345 ft. pit, which neither of us had been to.

First though we took a trip to north Alabama where we dropped many classic pits, Notably Natural Well 186 ft. Surprise Pit Fern cave 404ft. and Fantastic Pit ,Ellison's cave 510 ft. Being the only wet-suited cavers in Huntsville we were offered the chance to explore a newly found sink on a nearby ridge. It was taking lots of water , about 4 cusecs, and turned out to be very exciting, 400ft. deep, 3/4 mile long, with a super 176 ft entrance drop followed by a 50ft deluge drop. We named it Wil's Welsh Well.

From here we sped off west towards the small town of Langtry Texas, and after 26 hours of hard driving we were in the company of some other SMG cavers planning a trip down the deepest Texas Cave, Langtry lead at 471 ft.

A few days later we arrived at the house of Norman Pace. The decor of the house is mainly photos of caves, and most of these are Sumidero Yochib in Chiapas Mexico. The spectacular nature of this monster river cave was discussed in great detail. One afternoon Mike Boon and Wes Davies arrived on the way to Chiapas, heading for the next assault on the cave.

After talking to Mike about the cave we abandoned the trip to El Sotano and planned to meet everyone down in Chiapas in March. But the slides we saw were nearly enough to make us stay in Canada.

We eventually talked ourselves into the trip. We heard how, the year before Boon, Norm and others had nearly been swept away in the entrance passage by a flash flood, caused by 4" of rain falling in 1/2 hour. Boon's feeling now was that any trips into the cave could only be safe if there was a telephone system installed in the cave. A few days later we continued our grand tour.

We reached Edmonton about a week later after a brief stay in Bozeman Montana where we were joined by another caver Ron Zuber

who hitched a ride with us to Portland Oregon for a caving conference. After being lazy in the home of caver John Pollack in Edmonton we set off toward Seattle via the best views of the whole trip in the Jasper and Banff National Parke. We left Ron in Portland and set of south to San Francisco and Yosemite. Here the weather was unkind and we only managed a short glimpse of the wall of El Capitan.

We arrived in Los Angeles a day later. The next stop was at the Grand Canyon for a three day walk to the bottom and back. There followed a long drive to the house of Pete Lord in Mexico City.

The area we were heading for in Chiapas is north of the town of San Cristobal de las Casas. The Sierra Madre limestones here are Lower-middle Cretaceous, 2400 metres thick, and are folded and faulted to form the Chiapas Massif. Yochib is a small village some 56 km from the town and the road was only bulldozed in 1976, but noe gives much easier access to the area. About half way we reached the town of Tenjapa where the road was blocked due to a local dispute, and we had to bribe our way through. Pulling into the camp site we heard that everyone had experienced the same hassle.

The next morning was cloudy but bright and everone was up and about by 7 am. We made plans over breakfast. Boon suggested three separate parties to go into the cave, a rigging team, a camping team, and anyone extra securing the telephone line. In about 30 hours we were ready to go. The rigging team consisted of Bill Steele and five others, Laying the telephone line would be Boon Wes and myself, following us were Norm Pace and three others.

We trudged through Yochib village and assembled at the spectacular entrance. Blake reported that the water was about one foot above normal, but the weather looked good.

Average water flow for the season is about 60 cusecs, and the entrance, 120ft high and 100 ft wide made the river look small; but moving downstream the true size of the cave becomes apparent. 1000 ft. in the water starts to fall, and a 20ft handline enables a crossing to be made at the head of an 80ft waterfall. A free-hanging rope lands just next to the waterfall as it falls into a huge lake.

The scene is like a hurricane with huge amounts of water, the noise is deafening, and the waves with lashing spray make the prospect of swimming across the lake grim. From here the river crashes down a series of short drops with pools, and the fun really starts. Nowhere in Yochib can anyone swim upstream, so every pool below every drop has to be rigged with a line to make it possible to get back. Great care has to be taken to explain the procedure to people who are new to the cave. After four of these short drops and a 250 ft. canal Fool's falls are reached, and I felt I was getting into the swing of things. The next drop is split by a rock bridge, the first rope lands you on the bridge, a scene of chaos as the river falls free past you, the next rope goes off into space with a landing in the lake. Halfway down the gale hits you and carbide lights are extinguished. Below me Boon was trying to grapple for some ladders he accidentally dropped into the pool on a previous trip. Another short drop leads to an easy 25 ft section of traverse, then a few more sections to the campsite.

At the campsite we decided to have a break with a very impressive view of the lake, and Bad Dreams corner just below us.

We set off down Bad Dreams and the telephone line became badly tangled. One hour later we were still fighting it, so we gave up and tied it off. We continued on down, the spectacular situations were really impressive. Here the river turns almost a full circle, dropping almost 100ft in the process. Down below it was indescribable, the wind and spray made anything difficult, communication was only possible with whistles. Boon was giving thought to the next piece of rigging, a tyrolean across the river. We inspected the rigging on our side, and Boon started off while Wes and I tried unsuccessfully to keep our carbide lamps going. Then we noticed the rigging team coming up from below. One hour later there was a large group of us standing around. Boon Wil and Wes decided to stay the night, while the rest of us went out for more supplies and a break from the din.

We surfaced at 2 am after 20 hours below. When we reached camp we were greeted by some relieved faces but were shocked to hear that Norm Pace was nearly drowned in a waterfall. Miraculously he had survived but had lost his spectacles. Getting to sleep that night was not difficult except for the ringing in our ears.

While other people entered the cave we spent a day driving to and from SanCristobal. In the evening Bill Liebman and I prepared to go into the cave. This was to be Bill's first trip and we intended to carry on laying the telephone line below camp. As we were about to leave Wil Howie appeared with a report that progress had been slow due to the amounts of water, but they had left Bill Steele and Jean Jancewicz at camp. Jim Smith and Mike van Note had gone in earlier to continue the push. But as we were leaving camp Jim and Mike arrived saying that things had gone really well, and along with Bill Steele they had reached the bottom of the cave earlier that day. It ended in a big room and a sump.

We decided that all that was left was to retrieve the telephone line reel and just have a caving trip. Soon we were back in the noise power and chaos of Yochib. My second trip, so not quite as mind boggling as the first. We made our way to the camp where we were greeted by Jean who cooked up a meal for us. I outlined to Jean that we would just go down and retrieve the reel which was near the waterfall below the tyrolean and would be back in an hour or so. Bad Dreams is a very appropriate name, but the tyrolean below was certainly the most impressive section of cave any of us had experienced. Crossing it was exciting with your feet dangling 2 ft. above the white water racing below. Next there was a 30 ft rope drop to a deep pool. I went down and found the water over my head. So I floated to the end of the line and tied off at the head of the next falls. This line now went straight across the river at the head of the falls. Bill joined me and I said that unless we intended to go any further it was pointless both of us going over because the telephone line reel was just the other side. Bill thought he had hurt his head enough in Yochib for one day and we should go out from there. I clipped onto the handline and started across, the water was up to my waist. I was swept over twanging to a stop on the line, I made a hasty retreat to where Bill was. Next time I leaned upstream against the current and made it to the other side. Here I clipped on the telephone line and a plastic bottle for buoyancy and started back. About mid-stream I came across a large boulder which had caused me trouble on the way across. then the reel and bottle were swept over the fall. I tried to pull them back but the current made this impossible; the next thing I was swept over, facing downstream.

I was hanging underwater trying to breathe when I suddenly shot down another three feet. This left me just able to keep my head above water. I looked up at a rather speechless Bill above. He tied himself on and lowered a Gibbs so that I could prussik back up the line. I started up the line until I reached a big overhang at the top. Here I could not climb any higher because of the force of the water. Eventually Bill lowered another Gibbs and with some difficulty I climbed up beside him. Everybody had one fright in Yochib, and this had certainly been mine.

We made tracks back to camp and heard from Jean that we had been gone nearly 6 hours. We told her the story and discussed the way this cave can shake you back to reality just when you are getting used to it. As there were two spare sleeping bags we decided to spend the night, after all we had been underground now for 16 hours.

Waking up in Yochib is an experience. The noise is always there and the constant drone of Bad Dreams below. We left camp carrying out the reel and some gear that was not needed any more. Before we left Bill Steele told me to tell everyone who was coming into Yochib that night to expect the sort of caving below the stinger to be the hardest they would ever do. He said it was the most ferocious wet caving he had known.

So Bill Liebman and I left the camp carrying the reel and one duffle bag of unwanted. Slowly and deliberately we made our way back upstream and encountered no problems until we reached the succession of short climbs above Fool's falls. Here carrying anything was tiresome but 5 hours later we were out in the afternoon sunshine. As we trudged into camp there was great activity with many people getting ready to go down to survey and photograph the place. We just decided to relax and enjoy the sunshine.

Next day was another shopping trip into San Cristobal. Bill Steele and other rich people had chartered a light aircraft to have a look at the pits to the north of Yochib. We arrived back at camp hearing more stories about how this cave was intent on eating someone. This time it was Carmen Soileau. She had had a nasty experience in the bad canals and had been so badly shaken she had elected to stay in camp while everyone else came out. I could not understand why no one had stayed with her. Finally Boon and took a trip to camp so she could come out. We reached camp in 2 hours and came out again in 6. Since everyone was out all that needed to be done was to de-rig the cave. A strong team went in to start this. As Boon & I had been in and come out about 6 am we waited until midnight before deciding about going in again to help. During the next 8 hours the whole cave was de-rigged and the exploration was complete.

We did spend one more day at the pits sighted from the air. One was 150 ft the other was a spectacular drop of 285 ft. We named this pit Cima de Zametal. A party was sent off to survey the possible resurgence of Yochib, the Salida de la Cruz Pilal. We broke up and spent one day at a great camp site at Arcolete near a river cave before Wil and I set off for Mexico City where we climbed the beautiful Volcano Popocatepetl.

Reflecting on Yochib some people might think I have overdone

some of the drama. Well- other cavers expressed the same feelings. Mike Boon's feelings were that it was the most demanding and technical cave he had ever attempted, and he never wanted to tackle another like it. He said it required more caution and thought than any cave of his repertoire

Rigging the cave in 1977 required 27 vertical rope pitches, 23 rigged canal lines and 12 ladder pitches. A survey of the cave is in the latest Canadian Caver, and precise details will be published in the next Association of Mexican Cave Studies Newsletter.

Anyone wishing to explore the cave should first contact someone who has been there. This may save unrealised problems.

We are planning another Mexico trip this winter 78/79 to the north of Mexico, Sotano de la Cuesta 520 ft. Golondrinas 1100 ft. and then to look at a virign area in Guatemala; later returning to Mexico to look at the possibilities of walking into the El Sotano area to drop that one, the world's biggest drop of 1345 ft. Anyone seriously interested contact me.

Gareth J. Davies.

#### CLIMBING AND CAVING IN 1809 - 1810

In 1808 as a newly qualified physician aged 22 Francis Sacheverell Darwin set out on a journey through Spain and the Eastern Mediterranean. He climbed some mountains and visited several caves. An account of his methods makes an interesting comparison with those of present day explorers.

Early in March 1809 he wished to ascend the heights of the Sierra Nevada in Southern Spain.

" I prevailed on Mr. McKinnon to accompany me part of the way, which he did at 5 o'clock the next morning. To ascend the mountain we passed through woods and rocks; and - prepared with a bottle of laudanum, nails in my shoes, a hammer and stick, I took leave of my friend and the guide at the beginning of the snow at middday, when they returned to Granada. The object of this undertaking was to explore the original formation of the mountain, as I perceived near the summit a part of the rock exposed like a small precipice After the first three or four hours climbing through the snow with a burning Sun over my head - which kept cool with a piece of ice in my mouth, with feet and body almost frozen from repeated falls in the snow - sometimes 10 or 15 feet where the footing was false - the frozen region gradually became harder, and the snow occasionally would bear one foot sometimes both, until about the fifth hour when it was perfectly hard and firm ice.

Now it became steeper and more abrupt as I climbed up the ridge of the mountain chain, breaking holes for my feet with the hammer. Had it not been for the opium which I took every ten or fifteen minutes I might have been hurled down the steep upon the ice with dreadful velocity for - as it seemed many miles - into the bosom of the earth or into a valley of eternal Winter. Still resolved to proceed, I pushed as the evening advanced, knowing it would be moonlight; but clouds

collected, and with difficulty I could just distinguish by my watch that it was 9 o'clock when I attained the foot of the wished for granite precipice. Here within one hundred feet of the highest part of the chain of mountains I rested and took more laudanum. Now the most awful hours I ever witnessed began. Darkness prevailed below and thunder shook the rocks. There was some light from an obscured Moon. The situation of an individual on this elevation and at such a time is too difficult to describe. I was kept there by the lightning until 2 o'clock in the morning. At ten o'clock I breakfasted with my friends in Granada, bringing back a piece of granite, and an empty bottle of laudanum.

F.S.Darwin

#### JUNIPER GULF - AN APPRECIATION OF VERTICAL CAVING

Standing in the Sun on the Allotment in wetsuit trousers and wellies was not my idea of a Saturday afternoon jaunt down Juniper Gulf. However after two hours searching for the supposedly "obvious large rift entrance" we had at last found it.

When we recovered from the two mile walk up Crummock Dale, and Mick's guided tour of the allotment, we rigged the entrance pitch. This is a free-hanging 60 ft. pitch from a natural stake. The water crashes down the far end of the rift, and provided a welcome shower after the fierce heat outside.

Several climbs and a short traverse lead to the second and third pitches, which can be rigged as two 25 ft. pitches, or together with 50 ft. of ladder. My cell gave up the struggle, and I eventually resorted to a borrowed carbide lamp, since mine had disappeared on the Allotment somewhere.

At the bottom of the third pitch you get the feeling that this is the sort of trip where your feet never really touch the ground; launching out on to a 100 ft. knee traverse emphasises the fact. This is hardly surprising when you consider that Juniper Gulf drops 420 ft. in a modest 800 ft. length of passage to the sump.

Near the end of the traverse is the celebrated 'Bad Step'. This is either a desperate running jump and lunge for the 'Thank God' jug with tackle bag and rope between your teeth, or a more sedate lifelined move which gives you time to peer down the 80 ft. or so of fresh air below. It is worth a line as the tackle has to be hauled over anyway. This is a must for the Alpha-Beta and Birthday Traverse fanatics.

The fourth pitch follows just around the corner, and a good flake in the roof gives a superb freehang on a single rope needing a small amount of protection at the top. After sorting out the SRT gear Mick clipped on and abseiled down. I followed down this fluted 90 ft. pitch, freehanging all the way. When Iain came down we followed the stream to the fifth pitch which is either 175 ft. from here or 200ft. from a roof traverse. Here again a large flake provides a sound belay needing only slight protection at the top.

Mick went first, and as I leaned out over the pitch I watched his light slowly disappear, and began to realise that 200ft. is quite a long way. The belay slackened, almost with relief, and I

clipped on using an optimistic six bars. Then I slid gingerly into the gloom. Unfortunately, just as you begin to enjoy the ride the bottom comes rising up fast and its time to stop.

A quick climb down and a short section of streamway lead to the final sump - a dark frothy pool which seems a disappointing end to such a fine pot.

As you return from the sump you suddenly remember that you are not in Swinsto and there are 420 ft. of pitches above you. Mick had started prussiking up and I followed up the long slog. My carbide went out halfway up but relit first time, a rare occurrence at the best of times.

Mick went on to the 90 ft. and Iain and I de-rigged. We soon followed up the 90 and all took a welcome rest to sort out rope and gear. Mick and Iain sped across the traverses and I started, but managed to drop my rope, so after a few carefully chosen words from up front Iain chimneyed down to have a closer look at the stream and managed to recover the rope. However recovering Iain was not quite so easy, but combined tactics eventually saw him back on top.

We passed the two 25's with no further problems and stumbled into the entrance rift. We all climbed the entrance 60 and after hauling tackle collapsed on the grass in the evening sun. All agreed it was a fine hole and certainly an excellent days caving.

Simon R. Kelly

#### JANUARY 1810 ON THE ISLAND OF ANTIPAROS

....The Governor inquired how many men I would have to attend me to the Grotto; and on hearing them talk of 30 or 40 I declared that 10 were sufficient and I would pay for no more. Ropes Ladders Lights, etc being procured, I set off for the cavern, and counted no less than 43 men - most of them armed - in my suite.

Proceeding for nearly three hours up the hills, we came to the entrance of the famous grotto, and at four o'clock in the morning entered its subterranean saloons. In the beginning it presents an awful appearance: large stalactites support the entrance, which soon becomes narrow, and darkness prevails. With the help of rope ladders, the first obstacle is soon got over - a descent of about 30 feet - and then, holding by a long rope, you walk down a ridge inclining to a great angle, and darkness and depth obscure each side. Cautiously passing down thus for about 200 yards, and hearing stones and broken stalactites - displaced by each footstep - rolling into the abyss, you arrive at another precipice. Here you climb down an old rope ladder left there, fastened to a large stalactite, by Lord Elgin: it is about 40 feet, and then you are happily at the bottom of the cave. All the candles and torches being held up, you are filled with amazement at the wonderful appearance; and, gazing on these grand resplendent and snow-white columns, you tremble at the vast and secret works of nature.

The stalactites are of that kind of carbonate of lime called arragonite, and the variety of crystallisation is very curious. I brought away some differing much in this respect. The generality of them being radiated from a hole in the centre which does not contain any fluid. The resemblance of the crystals to a variety of vegetables is very striking.

Francis S. Darwin



## OGOF CRAIG Y FFYNNON

For many years the various resurgences in the Clydach Gorge have been dug and pumped without much success; but, with Agen Allwedd Water appearing in the gorge, efforts had been made at selected sites, and at last one of them has gone.

The final successful effort was made from August ] when John Parker, Geoff Hill and Ann Franklin entered through a small boulder jam a small well decorated chamber, which led via a nasty duck to other straw filled chambers and the inevitable boulder choke. This boulder choke was passed in October '76 and progress made to a second boulder choke with a short canal passage and a 40' on the way.

I entered the scene to push the second boulder choke and continued the stimulating exercise of removing boulders from the steeply ascending passage until July '77, when we entered a large passage containing formations of all kinds, including large gour pools and a multitude of stal and crystal formations.

The third choke yielded after one hours work and four sticks of chemical persuader. This gave us a large bedding plane crawl and phreatic passages and chambers reminiscent of upstairs in OFD II. A pot came to light in October leading to a series of sandy passages with some of the most beautiful formations in all the country, in my humble opinion

The fourth boulder choke which looked enormous is proving to be just that, as we have dug it since Nov '77 and are at least 200 ft. into it at present with no sign of an end; but with the now expected howling draught.

So that, apart from a stream passage which came into the reckoning in May '77 is Ogof Craig y Ffynnon. In all around 4 miles have been surveyed so far, with a very interesting possibility of connection to other caves in the area, not least Agen Allwedd. Who knows what will eventually result from the exploration of Mynydd Llangattwg. OFD look to your laurels!

For many years I have been analysing resurgence water in the Clydach Gorge and surrounding area, and the possibility of tying up some of the risings was too good to miss. The Limekiln Stream and Ogof Capel had consistently given similar analyses; both slightly different from the Aggie risings up the valley; and I always expected a common source for these springs. So I was delighted to see, near second boulder choke in the new cave a sump taking a small stream. In went the dye. Sure the Limekiln Stream showed a positive trace within the day,  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile distant; the next day there was a slight trace in Ogof Capel  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distant.

The lack of any other water except the occasional flood prevented any further work, but in May a streamway appeared after Parker had annihilated the sump, and in went the dye. Again Limekiln and Capel showed positive, so we had a dual resurgence.

After passing the third boulder choke we again encountered a stream. Was it the same one? In went the dye, and it was Limekiln and Capel again. However this time Capel was a much stronger trace, even stronger than Limekiln, which was very strange. So we have now a stream of well over 1 mile in a straight line flowing parallel to the Agen Allwedd stream but up dip of it.

The water comes from the Eglwys Faen area, so I next tried Llangattock Swallet. Several people have tried this without success, and in the event so did I, twice. So there it stands; we have a lengthy stream, although we cannot follow the passage throughout. It floods with immense amounts of water in a pulse pattern, and resurges in two places  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile apart. It is very close to the Aggie stream, although seemingly not connected.

W. Gascoine

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

I intend to publish a Newsletter approximately every three months over the next year. I should like to be able to include articles and photographs on all topics of interest to various sections of the memberships. This includes exploration of new systems in South Wales and elsewhere, accounts of scientific work of all descriptions relating to caves and limestone geology, Archaeology, Speleotechnology, expeditions to strange and distant lands, Club affairs and any other relevant subjects.

So, far as possible business notices, club gossip, addresses and other assorted items will be kept for the Newsheet, which will come out more frequently, according to demand.

All this depends on a steady flow of articles from members to fill the twenty or so pages we need to produce each quarter. Photographs, surveys, and technical illustrations are also welcome.

It may be that some members have material to hand which could be used for an article, but they do not quite know how to turn it into a suitable form. In such a case I should be most willing to help. If you let me see your notes, photographs, or diagrams I shall be glad to help you work them up into an appropriate shape for publication.

In the absence of sufficient material I may be reduced to publishing a serial novel of Love and Passion among the stalagmites. If you wish to avoid this experience please send me something better.

For the next Newsletter I should like to have your contributions by September 1st, but earlier than that if you would like assistance with the writing.

W.E. Clarke

## LOST JOHNS CAVE, YORKSHIRE

Here we were, already into March, 1978 and no serious caving attempted. With several of us feeling right frisky after a weeks' fell walking in the snowy Lake District, we decided to put things to rights.

Pete Cardy was prevailed upon to stop smashing up his new house, take off that ridiculous green jumper he has been wearing lately (there is a rumour circulating in North London that he's aiming to take over the job of the Green Gnome of Penwyllt!) and to join Pete Hall, Steve Warne and myself, plus a couple of St. Albans C.C. bods and attempt Lost Johns Cave in Yorkshire. Problems on where to stay! I've developed an aversion to paddling through the cowsh. at 1 a.m. on a Saturday morning to reach the door of the Bolton S.C. hut at Winskill, and some of us having met some of the R.S.J. bending, flame spitting Yorkshire lasses at Penwyllt felt we would be safest in the monastic seclusion of the Yorkshire Ramblers hut at Low Stern.

After a good breakfast in the transport cafe at Ingleton we were off onto Leck Fell and underground by 10 a.m. With the ladders neatly divided amongst the party and the longer ropes safely stowed in some very natty nylon bags courtesy of (Secureyourcord?) With Tony Hall and Andy Naylor of S.A.C.C. leading we were quickly down the 10ft first pitch and soon up into the roof traverse, nobody having fallen into any of the three holes in the floor. Andy and Tony were then sent down the 40ft second pitch followed by the tackle for the 99ft pitch three 'Centipede' which is rigged from the eye bolt provided, the life liner belaying onto a huge bulk of timber jammed between the rocks. At the foot of 'Centipede' the route travelled off to the right, down a narrow rift passage and leading to Bob's Pit (25ft) then Candle Pot (another 25ft) and finally Shistol Pot (10ft) then continuing in the rift until Battleaxe Pit was reached. There we ran into problems. The pitch is reached via an almost 180° turn to the left onto some wooden stemples in a traverse high above a stream passage. It was felt safest to rig a fixed line over this section so that we could each crab on as we negotiated the traverse to reach the ladder hanging from an eye bolt, also the tackle for the remaining pitches could be moved more easily along. Andy and Tony moved out first, rigged the 35ft. pitch and climbed down to the ledge above the 65ft pitch. The first part of this pitch needs a bit of courage on the leader's part, as the first 15ft or so is a tightish squeeze; the remainder opens out and there is a fair chance the ladder will swing away from the ledge which has to be reached. It was from this ledge that we were going to ladder the next pitch, but the volume of water falling from Thunderstorm Pot and over the line of descent ruled this out. However there is an alternative route via a chute onto a 2ft ledge which narrows to about 2" as it slopes down and out over the abyss and at the end of this ledge is an eye bolt.

Tony and Andy were not too keen on attempting to rig this so Pete Cardy and Steve Warne climbed down to assist and eventually between them they fixed up a line using a long tether out to the eye bolt and with this serving as an aerial guideline laddered the pitch. This aerial line would also give a safe means of return. This rigging took the better part of an hour and Pete Hall and I were kept hanging around on the stemples above, neither able to see anything nor due to the noise

of the waterfall, could we hear anything. With the pitch rigged at last Tony, Pete and Steve descended the 65ft into the small stream. Andy lifelined Pete Hall and myself down to the ledge and offered to see Pete down the second ladder. Pete could then lifeline us both down from the bottom.

Here my own problems started. Safely clipped onto the aerial wire via a crab on my chest harness and with a spare crab ready for the loop in the lifeline hanging through the pulley at the top of the ladder, I gingerly eased my way down the chute onto the ledge and slowly slid my boots sideways along the narrowing ledge, reaching carefully for the lifeline and clipped the spare crab on. Not so bad so far. I bellowed down to Pete Hall to give a tight line, unclipped from the aerial wire and stepped onto the ladder, (lifeline nice and tight, good!) Started climbing down 10-20ft with the noise from the waterfall getting louder. At 25ft I was stopped by too tight a lifeline; bellowed to Pete to give me some slack, tried again but still too tight. Has the rope jammed in the pulley? Bellowed to Pete - NO ANSWER - called up to Andy to see if the line had jammed. 'No' says he, with a reassuring tug on the rope 'it's free through the pulley'. I shouted down to Pete again, this time leaning out and looking over my shoulder. Through the spray I can see a cap lamp. Peter's voice from below 'Alan will you..... O.K.? What? I yelled. Pete's reply inaudible. Three times this bellowing back and forth. I looked down again and couldn't see a cap lamp. Don't say he's gone and left me hanging!! I yelled 'Pete' - nothing. Again 'Pete' - nothing. Louder 'PETE'!! I was getting a bit, just a little bit, ANXIOUS. I called up to Andy, 'I think the bastard has sodded off and left me hanging here, I'm coming up again if you can lifeline me'. Second thoughts Andy isn't that safely belayed himself up there and I'd be safer where I am so hang on lad and wait!

After what seemed an eternity there was sounds from below. Pete Hall's voice and also Pete Cardy's. All I could make out was 'Hang on' (more chatter from below) then 'O.K. Climb down'. Bloody relief, my caving undies were just about to get a more definite brown stain. Quickly I climbed down all set to let off steam. However, the explanation of the F.U. was both funny and cautionary. As Pete had started to lifeline me the rope which was between his feet in the small stream was washed away, and ended up snagged down near the final pitch. He couldn't free it from where he was so called for me to crab onto the ladder while he went to sort it out. Due to the roar from the waterfall which was masking some of the instructions, he was under the impression I'd understood him.

Fortunately Pete Cardy sitting at the top of the final pitch saw the end of the rope in the stream and followed it back to see what was up. After all this hassle Andy decided not to come any further and to stay belayed on the ledge above the 65ft pitch. We climbed the final 25ft pitch down into the stream again and on into the master cave. Turning left and upstream we found some OFD II type passages up into the roof which we perfunctorily explored. It was decided to call for a return to surface at this point as

- 1) Andy was alone on his ledge
- 2) We were likely to be overdue
- 3) We were all getting a bit tired
- 4) The pubs would be opening soon!.

At the last pitch the ladder was some 3-4ft short which caused the

two shorter S.W.C.C. lads a bit of trouble. Andy Naylor was still fairly cheerful when we reached him on his ledge. The de-tackling of Battleaxe Pit went very smoothly and we were quickly at the foot of 'Centipede'. Here our tiredness was beginning to show, as the first lad up the pitch needed a rest half way up and so did the second. Lad number three needed two rests and number four needed three and so did number five. When number six took his fifth rest things looked like getting desperate. However after a rest and some food all was soon O.K. and we climbed the 40ft with no problems. The rest of the trip out was uneventful, except some of us managed to miss the left hand turn near the entrance to Quicksand Cave. Finally we were all out of the cave by 9 p.m.

We had a fast change by the roadside and drove down to the pub at Ingleton to meet another party of S.A.C.C. who were doing Tatham Wife, sank a few much needed jars of ale, wolfed down some pie and peas and were all tucked up in bed by 11.15 p.m, even Pete Cardy who was first into his sack! What would have been a superb night's sleep was disturbed by one S.W.C.C. lad who couldn't find the door in the total darkness of Low Stern and woke us all up in his attempts to climb through a large picture frame!

ALAN JACKSON.

