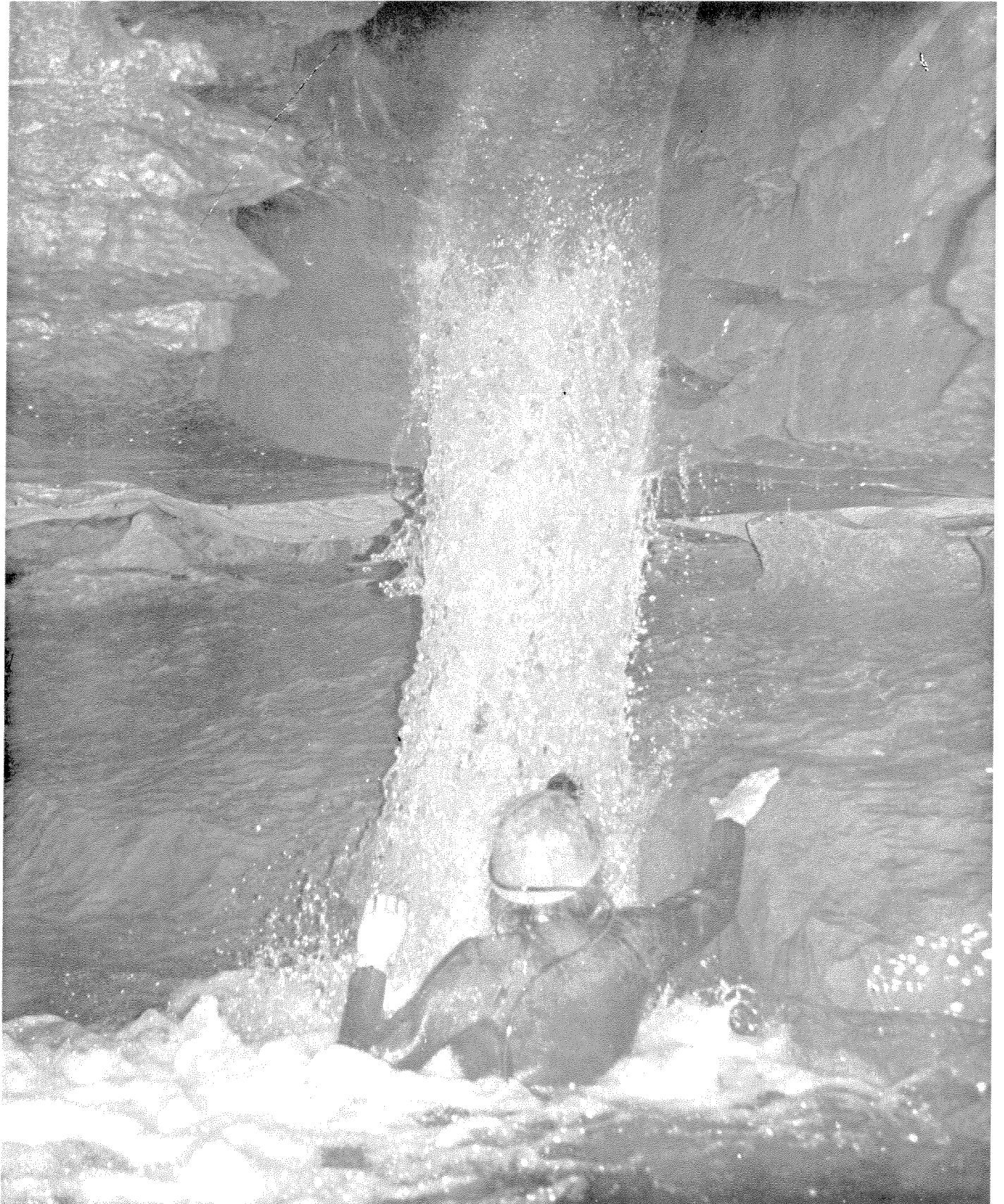


SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB



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No.95

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 1981

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH

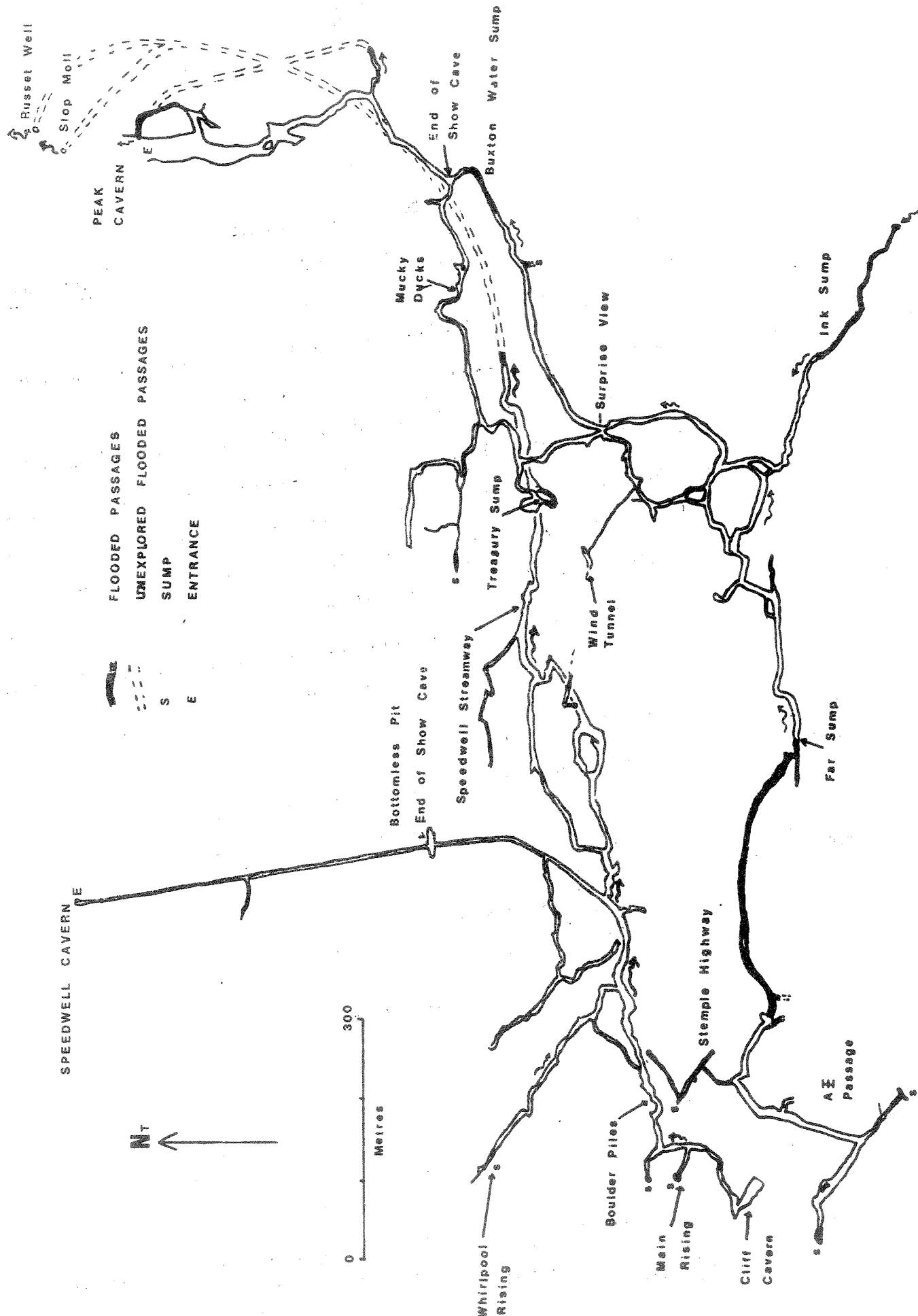
Dr.Bannister's Handbasin - Long Churn - Dave Edwards

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Hon.Editor: Dave Edwards
109, Elgin Avenue,
HARROW,
Middx HA3 8QN.

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The opinions expressed in articles printed in this Newsletter are those expressed by individual contributors and are not necessarily upheld or supported by the Editor or any other Officer of the South Wales Caving Club.



THE PEAK - SPEEDWELL SYSTEM

AFTER SURVEYS BY T. FORD AND J. BECK

EXPLORATIONS IN PEAK CAVERN

During the autumn of 1979, limited diving access was regained to Peak Cavern, in Derbyshire. After a nine year ban on underwater activities, many cave divers were keen to continue the exploration of this important system. A profusion of sumps exist with very good potential for further discoveries.

A great deal of diving has taken place in Peak since the early years of the sport. The first significant breakthrough came as early as January 1949 when G. Mack and Don Coase passed the Buxton Water Sump, in what is today the middle reaches of the cave. This 130 metre dive was a highly creditable feat using oxygen rebreathing apparatus and a substantial discovery was made. Amazingly, on the very same day, the diver's support team succeeded in passing the Mucky Ducks and the two parties explored on, independently, to the six metre Surprise View Pitch. The new passages more than doubled the length of the cave and led rapidly to the total exploration of over 4km of passages.

Few could ignore the strategic locations of both Ink Sump and Far Sump. (Treasury Sump was also very important as this was later to give access to Speedwell Cavern, a 4km system to which both cavers and cave divers are barred at the present time.) These sumps clearly offered great promise; situated, as they were, at the furthest extremities of the cave. Ink Sump was first dived by Bob Davies and Graham Balcombe in 1952. Equipped with oxygen apparatus, a penetration of more than 70 metres was halted by the risk of oxygen poisoning as the divers approached their limiting depth of 10 metres. It was not until the adoption of the wet-suit and compressed-air apparatus that further progress was to be made. Dives by Ken Pearce, John Sinclair and James Cobbett subsequently continued to a point 122 metres from base. Here exploration ceased, until 1979. Far Sump had also been investigated by Tom Brown in 1970, but only limited progress was made owing to the silty conditions. After a shallow but sandy wriggle at the start, Sump 1 had been passed after a 7 metre dive. Unfortunately, only 12 metres beyond lay Sump 2 and this was examined for about 15 metres to reach an intimidating squeeze at a depth of six metres.

In late 1979 the Derbyshire section of the Cave Diving Group set to on the main sites and a series of dives took place at each location. At Ink Sump the activists were Steve Tucker, Tim Nixon, John Cordingley and Brian Hague. On 2nd March 1980 the deepest point, 13 metres, had been passed together with an awkward squeeze and Steve Tucker reached an air bell 220 metres from base. However, 10 metres further on a boulder choke was encountered. Clearly this lay very close to another air surface and in all probability the end of the sump. The season ended at Easter and it was not until the autumn of 1980 that efforts could be renewed. Hague, the explosives expert, now devised and created an underwater charge (4.5kg) to remove the blockage. Several weeks of careful preparation were required and on the 22nd February 1981 the detonation took place. The following week witnessed the effectiveness of the bang and Hague, accompanied by Tucker, was able to surface at the end of the sump. Unfortunately, big open passage proved elusive. A 10 metre aven was found with a small stream tumbling from somewhere at the head. The feasibility of a climb was ascertained and the pair made their exit.

At Far Sump the conditions dictated a rather slower and more cautious advance. The activists here were initially Jerry Murland and Tim Nixon. Over the course of a couple of dives the terminal

squeeze in the second sump was passed. The divers quickly realised that the topography of this sump, in particular that of the squeeze, could vary considerably from week to week. After a flood the squeeze would be non-existent, while under 'dry' conditions there would be a progressive silting action. As in Ink Sump the water was clear, but beyond the squeeze the route gave a cross-sectional measurement of only about 1.75 metres width by 1 metre height. This proved comfortable - before the copious quantities of silt were disturbed. On the return, visibility was down to less than 0.3 metres, more typical of normal British conditions.

At the end of the first season's diving, about 120 metres had been explored into Sump 2. Murland made a further dive in January 1981 taking the limit to 130 metres. At this point I joined the attack and on my first dive I noted that the deepest point lay just beyond the squeeze, (7 metre depth) and thereafter the trend was very gradually upward. This visit witnessed a penetration of 285 metres and a terminal depth of only 1.2 metres. A second assault on March 1st succeeded in reaching two air surfaces beyond a low, muddy section. The expectations were high but the line ran out at 410 metres. Again the depth was less than one metre so, unable to resist the lure of the passage, the diver continued warily for 10 metres to an underwater junction. To the left, due South, the route went deeper while in a North-Westerly direction a low, muddy continuation led on at the same depth. Further progress without a line would have been reckless so the diver groped back to the security of his leaded line and made a rough survey en route out.

On Sunday 8th March, on my third dive, I set off with another 200 metres of line and even greater air reserves. I was grateful to reach the first, cramped air-bell as several acute problems had developed. In a few minutes these were solved and the dive proceeded. Reaching the junction, a choice of routes existed. The main flow appeared to originate from the left, while the shallow, muddy passage on the right seemed to suggest that it was the main continuation. The latter was more or less geologically 'up dip' and this swayed the balance. Moving forward, the passage was lower than hitherto; only 0.6 metres high and carpeted with a thick, oozy mud. Suddenly, at 435 metres, it surfaced and I could hear plainly the echo of a waterfall. Far Sump had been cracked!

Within a few metres an inlet was found, spouting into a chamber from a height of over 5 metres. The kit was quickly dropped on a convenient mud-bank and the climb was assessed. Whilst searching for a belay point for the diving line another piece of exceptionally good fortune arose; a large passage was found beyond an awkward boulder obstruction at water level. This was the continuation of the main passage, trending once more North-West. The inlet climb was abandoned and the feelings of excitement grew with every step. About 90 metres from the sump the passage regained proportions similar to those downstream from Far Sump, that is, about 3 - 4 metres in diameter. At this point an inlet passage made its entry at roof level, two metres up on the right hand wall. With compass and Formica slates to hand, I continued. Fortunately the terrain proved kindly and it was only rarely that I stubbed my wet-suited toes against the odd boulder.

The passage was now orientated roughly South-West and 200 metres later a large T junction was reached. Ahead, even larger proportions loomed out of the blackness. Thoughts of the exit now appeared a consideration.

"Might be an idea to erect a small cairn here," I thought. There was a prominent boulder at this point and before I could place a rock on top of it something odd was noticed ----- scratches on the edge of the slab! A closer inspection revealed the splinter marks of a small pick hammer. At my left elbow I then noticed the remains of an old candle. This was unquestionable proof that I was not the first person to tread this route. 'The old man', some long forgotten, probably unrecorded, miner had been here before; searching for those elusive mineral veins which could yield wealth in the form of lead. In fact, he had almost certainly had exactly the same idea as myself; to mark the route for his own safe exit.

Passages beyond the 'T' junction were in turn followed in opposite directions to two sumps. Returning downstream to examine side passages, the question again arose as to where the unknown miner had made his entry. The small roof-tube inlet was reached once more. An easy scramble gave access and this was eagerly followed despite gradually lowering to a crawl. After 45 metres, a short length of rotting timber was found lying in the mud. Directly above lay an aven and peering upwards I could see, wedged from one wall to the other, countless black, decaying stemples. Clearly at this point a much larger passage had been intercepted, trending North-West to South-East at high level. One mystery at least had been solved.

Time was running short and it was essential to give no cause for alarm. Returning towards the sump, the letters 'AE' or 'AI' were found inscribed on a muddy boulder. Were these the initials of that early explorer, or just a miner's term indicating that this series of passages held little of interest? Perhaps we shall never know.

The end of the diving season was almost upon us and owing to flooding the final opportunity to continue the explorations came on the 28th March. This trip was again to be a solo effort. Reaching the destination at Stemple Highway (this time wearing boots), only 8 metres of progress could be made in the South-Easterly direction before a wide, greasy aven forced a retreat. The rotting timbers, although well niched into the wall in their day, were of no use; artificial aid was the order of the day.

In the other direction, North-West, a nasty 10 metre climb was eventually made. At a total height of 15 metres above the floor an impressive roof-tube was gained. All set for a major find, it was rather demoralising to discover a total of 150 metres of additional passage, terminated at a 20 metre plus aven. This was aligned along a mineral vein which had been prospected very briefly by the early miners. During the course of the trip, all the other dry passages in the extension were thoroughly examined including the Waterfall Passage at the end of Far Sump. The most significant outcome of this was not a lengthy addition to the overall passage total, but rather an immense respect for the early explorers. Those miners, 200 years before, had covered every nook and cranny in their quest for lead.

The total length of passage beyond Far Sump now stands at nearly 700 metres. Regarding the exact surface or cave entry point used by the miners, this still remains to be established. In this respect it is important to appreciate that the historical setting is somewhat confused. Documentary evidence exists relating to several 'lost' mines in the neighbourhood, together with a substantial amount of natural cave, which was intercepted and

utilised by the miners in the course of their activities. Elusive places such as Pilkington's Cavern and Sullivan's Cavern, among others, suggests clearly that a great deal of passage exists in this vicinity. From the updated survey it would appear that the proximity of the Stemple Highway network to Speedwell Cavern must rate the latter system, in particular the Boulder Piles, the most likely source of entry. However, historical evidence again possibly suggests that Speedwell Cavern had in fact been discovered before the half mile long level (today utilised as the Show Cave) was driven to the cave streamway - before 1781. Another mystery concerns the location of the main ore pockets in the system. Old records show that £3000 worth of ore was brought out from Speedwell. The main site has yet to be established and there is little evidence of mining in the Far Sump extension to date.

With an abundance of climbs, chokes and several new sumps waiting to be examined it is clear that future trips to Far Sump, Ink Sump and the upper reaches of Speedwell Cavern should be very interesting indeed.

Martyn Farr

CLUB MEETS - A COMMENT

Some of you will no doubt remember the article entitled 'Club Meets', by Pete Francis, which appeared in Newsletter No.93. The article commented on the apparent lack of organisation/enthusiasm within the Club with regard to cave discovery and exploration. As a fairly new member of the Club (which has a pretty distinguished record for this type of work) I was quietly confident that Pete's article would be just the stimulus to provoke discussions and decisions on this whole question. Much to my dismay, I learned a short while ago that there had only been one formal comment; and that from someone who is no longer a member of this Club! In view of this, and at the risk of being undiplomatic, I felt obliged to submit this article for publication.

This lack of response to an issue which surely lies at the heart of S.W.C.C.'s raison d'etre (viz. Constitution, section 2: The objectives of the Club shall be:- The discovery, exploration and survey of caves.....) raises several issues:-

1) From a purely practical point of view, I cannot believe that in a club with a membership of over 300 there is a lack of feeling about this subject. If there is not, then there is something lamentably wrong with S.W.C.C. If there is, then are we just too apathetic to make any effort to comment, let alone do anything about it? The article by Pete was designed (or so it would appear from the way it was written) to stimulate discussion. If we have views, why not air them through the Newsletter, even if it is only a letter to the Editor?! Surely this is a good way to communicate our feelings about the Club to all the members, rather than the few people that happen to be at Penwyllt at the same time as ourselves. If the word 'Club' is to have any significance, surely it means the ordinary members making some contribution to the way things are organised, rather than sitting back and waiting for the Committee to 'get on with it'. In order for them to do their job of representing you effectively, they need to have some idea of what people in the Club are thinking; and that means telling them! As previously suggested, it could be through the forum of the Newsletter.

2) This refers more to the actual content of Pete Francis's article. I think that the vast majority of active members would agree that there is something lacking in the Club; be it organisation, enthusiasm or whatever. As I mentioned earlier, I have only recently joined S.W.C.C. so I have no first hand experience of what the Club was like in the past. However, from discussions with other, more long-standing members, it is clear that activity is at an all time low. Of course, it is not at a standstill: there is the Cwm Dwr Upstream Choke and work over at Sinc y Giedd way among other things; but it is all very sporadic and disorganised. As Pete said in his article, 'South Wales probably offers the best area for discovery potential in Britain, with large systems just waiting to be found by those dedicated enough to look.' The question is, are we dedicated enough to look?

3) Of course it will be argued that all this takes time and that is precious enough as it is: yet, if the will is there (and we need to establish whether indeed it is, for half-hearted efforts always peter out - no pun intended) then it can be done. Pete's suggestion of Club meets is, I feel, a useful one. At present, any work carried out relies upon individuals deciding to go off and do things when they feel like it, with the result that much time is wasted to no avail. A programme of 'meets', although very organised, at least provides a little more motivation. It also gives an opportunity to plan in advance, instead of last minute scrambles to get equipment etc., together. So why not give this idea a trial run? We certainly would not be any worse off! In case people feel that I am merely shouting my head off instead of doing something, I would be prepared to help with the organisation. So how about it?

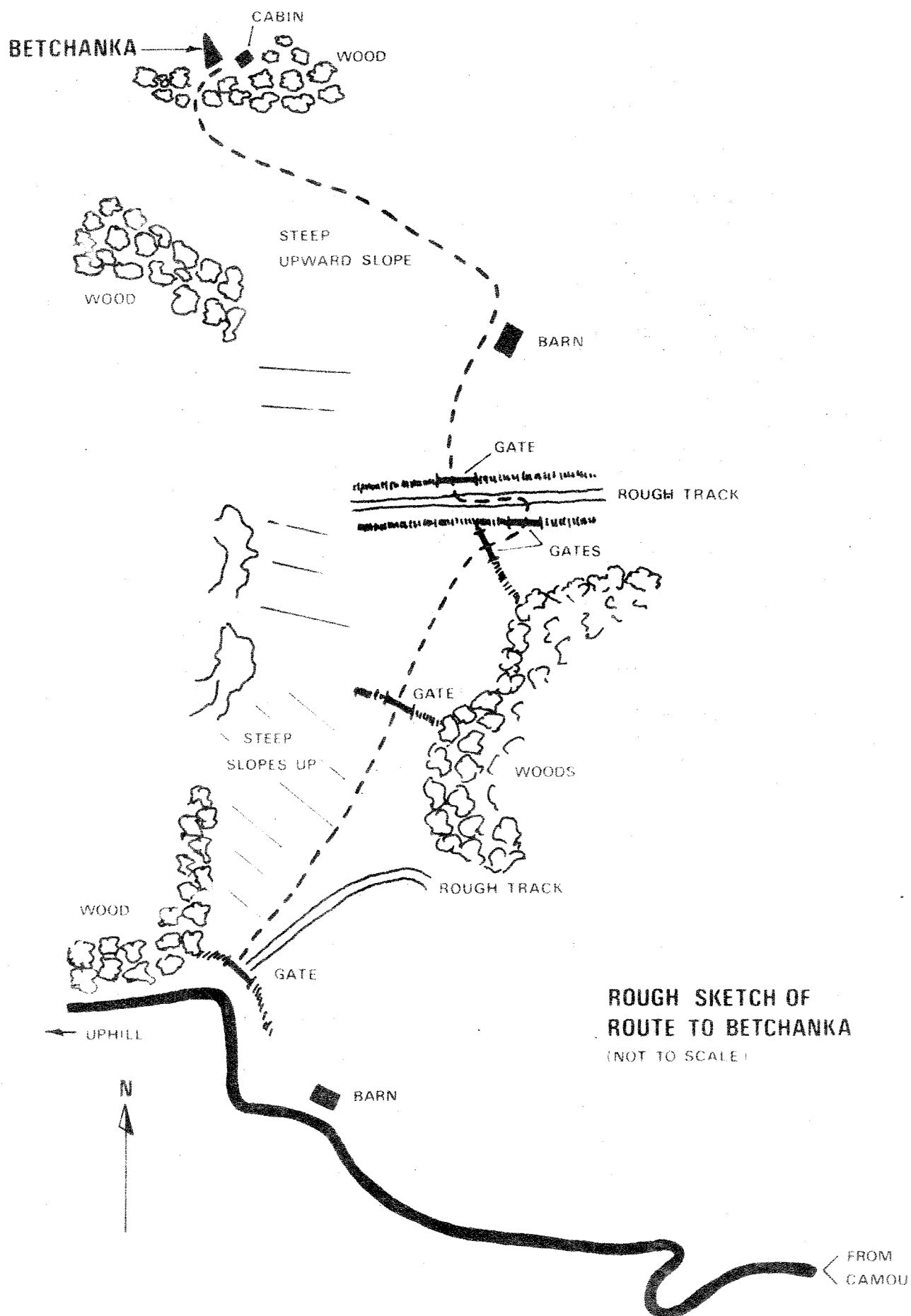
4) In the end, of course, it all comes down to individuals' own motivation. If we want S.W.C.C. to become a mere weekend retreat with caving facilities then at least let us make that a conscious decision rather than a gradual decline. If however, and I would hope that this applies to most cavers, we wish S.W.C.C. to regain its position as a leading caving organisation, then let us look very seriously at our own motives and wishes for the Club.

Derek Greateorex

GOUFFRE DE BETCHANKA - PYRENEES ATLANTIQUES

Any caver holidaying on the Cote Basque (from Biarritz to the Spanish border) has several excellent cave systems in the Pyrenees within two hours driving distance from the beaches. A 'must' for anyone with 250ft of rope and S.R.T. gear, is the Gouffre Betchanka, containing several vast, well decorated caverns.

Betchanka is best approached from Mauleon-Licharre (Pays Basque Est 1:50,000 walking map) along the N618 in the direction of Tardets. Just after Sauguis St.Etienne, turn right past a camp-site in a wood on the left and cross the river Saison to the village of Ossas. Continue through Ossas and go to Camou, a small, mucky village with a stream on the left of the road. (If using acetylene lamps this is the last place to obtain a supply of water as there are no streams en route to the cave or in Betchanka). The road bears left at the end of the village, but do not follow it. Keep straight on between two houses on a small road which soon rises steeply through two sharp hairpins. Soon after these, and about a kilometre from the village, a large barn is passed on the right.



ROUGH SKETCH OF
ROUTE TO BETCHANKA
(NOT TO SCALE)

A hundred yards farther on, a left-hand, uphill bend on the edge of a wood is reached. Stop on this bend in an ample layby on the right next to a gate and a ladder stile. The way on is over the stile and straight ahead, uphill slightly, aiming for the diagonally opposite corner of the field where there is another gate. (See sketch). Go through this and across the next field to a third gate. This third gate opens into the corner of a paddock with yet another gate to the left which opens onto a rough track. Turn left and cross the track to a fifth gate into a large field containing a barn. Walk past the barn on the left and strike up a steep, grassy hill for about 200 yards. Before the top of the hill is reached, turn right into a wood. The entrance to Betchanka is in this wood, next to a small hut containing the remains of a winch. The entrance, 7 metres wide by 20 metres long is railed off with a gate conveniently situated for access to the shaft. A thick cable is stretched across the shaft with a useful belay shackle for a free hang of the rope. The pitch is about 70 metres deep, depending upon who is consulted. It is probably wisest to take 75 metres to allow for a backup belay, and the varying opinion. No further tackle is needed as all the pitches below are equipped with substantial, fixed steel ladders.

The entrance shaft ends on a boulder pile and the way on is down a slope to the left when facing up the wall just descended. A 7 metre fixed ladder follows and then a 20 metre ladder into the large Salle des Champignons. The way on is via a 6 metre climb down a rift to the floor of the enormous Salle de la Grande Arche. Forward and bearing left, down through rocks covered in flowstone, leads to the 35 metre Puits de Joly. At the bottom of this pitch is the Salle de Blocs. Keep to the right, passing the way to the Salle des Chauves-souris on the left, and climb up about 40 metres to gain the Salle de la Borne which widens out into the beautifully decorated Cathedral.

Back at the start of the Salle de la Grande Arche, the way around to the right leads via several alternative paths into more dry and immense chambers containing many formations. One chamber, L'Entonnoir, is shaped like a huge funnel; in another part there is a small ridge between two chambers like a miniature Striding Edge.

The size and beauty of Betchanka makes any detailed description impossible. The route described takes about 6 hours and does not include several side chambers or the 80 metre rope pitch in Chauves-souris, however, it is hoped that these notes will be useful to any would-be explorers whose appetite has been whetted.

John Gillett

OGOF GOFAN - HISTORY AND ACCESS

It is necessary to correct two statements made by P. Francis in Newsletter No.93. The real discoverers of Ogof Gofan, South Pembrokeshire, are long dead for they were the egg collectors of the last century. People living near the coast supplemented their diet during the Spring by collecting eggs of guillemots, razor-bills and herring-gulls. The method was to lower the collector over the cliff on the end of a rope. The real history of the cave starts, of course, long before even this for I found Neolithic

pottery in it dated to about 2,000 B.C. The egg collecting tradition in Pembrokeshire is mentioned in books by R.M.Lockley and was also practised on St.Kilda and other islands.

I first spotted the entrance, a window in a sheer cliff, in August 1966 and took a BNS party to it five weeks later. We failed to gain entrance despite some hairy laddering by T.Pinckheard who bravely dangled 10ft away from the entrance, free-hanging over a boiling sea. This was exactly 12 months before John Parker started caving, which he did with me in Agen Allwedd on 22nd October 1967, so by no stretch of the imagination can John be said to be the discoverer of the cave and he would certainly not lay claim to this himself.

Eventually, entrance was gained via a back-door, detected by Bill Wilkes on 1st September 1968. This came about by a strange chance which has not been published before. I organised a caving trip to Pembrokeshire for the weekend starting 30th August: participating were John Parker, Bill Wilkes, Phil Hughes and I and three clubs can be said to have been represented; BNS/ICI, Cwmbran and SWCC. After a wet night under canvas on South Beach, Tenby, we explored various caves and one pothole from Giltar Point for 1½ miles westwards. We planned to take a boat to St.Margaret's Island and its caves, having obtained permission from the West Wales Naturalists' Trust. We were equipped with food and necessities for three days but the unsettled weather defeated that plan; Tenby boatmen felt that three days could easily stretch to a week. I therefore dragged the group to St.Govan's Head where none of them had caved before. We stayed the night in the Coastguard Station, braving another gale and rain, and next day walked the short distance to the '1966 Window'. Laddering was useless due to the overhang so we all spread out to search for an alternative entrance, for Pinckheard had reported seeing masses of stalagmite inside the 'window' from his precarious ladder position two years earlier. It was Bill Wilkes who spotted the back-door and the rest is well documented (see SWCC N/L No.61, November 1968 and Cwmbran C.C. Journal III).

The second mis-statement in N/L No.93 is that access to Ogof Gofan is denied. This is mischievous nonsense. Land above the cave is controlled by the Ministry of Defence as it is part of the Royal Armoured Corps Range, Castlemartin. The new Commandant of the Range, Col.Cousins, is very conservation concious and is also aware of the climbing and caving interests including archaeological and sporting caves, the birds and the Greater Horseshoe bats: indeed, these items were discussed at a meeting of the Range Advisory Committee on 19th February. They were due to be considered again on 11th March and County Curator Robert Kennedy maintains a watching brief for caving interests. Access arrangements have been published by Frank Baguley, Cambrian Caving Council, and are regularly updated after any change. Restrictions in Ogof Gofan are caused by Army firing times, the bird nesting season and the undisturbed archaeological remains in the entrance passages. Requests for a permit should be made to: The Camp Commandant, Castlemartin RAC Range, Merrion, Pembroke, Dyfed SA71 5EB.

Mel Davies

SOUTH PEMBROKESHIRE COASTAL CAVES, STACK ROCKS TO LINNEY HEAD.

In Newsletter No.93, referring to the Castlemartin Tank Range, Gary Jones states that 'by far the largest part is permanently out of bounds and unexplored as far as caves are concerned'. This is not correct as it is possible to obtain permission to visit all parts of the Range and all parts have been explored for caves. Also, his conclusion that a boat is essential is correct and was followed up by me on 17th July 1971 when Mr.& Mrs.P.Wilkins and I joined the local Coastguard Officer, Mr.D.Johns (now based at Holyhead), and traversed the foot of the cliffs from Newquay, SR975931, as far as a cave at 921943. Both of these sites are marked on the six inch map and in the latter cave, which is inaccessible except by boat, we had tea and a good look round finding that it had two entrances and a short passage running inland. At falling tide we were able to take the boat right inside the 'Promontory Fort' shaft described by G.Jones as a 'pit of about 25 metres across' at 9295 9455. This was an unforgettable experience as the walls of the pit are sheer for 150ft and the water very deep, like a vast, water-floored cathedral open to the sky. Some other details of the trip were given in N/L 71, April '72. Other details have been submitted to a previous Editor but remained unpublished for reasons best known to himself. The 'spectacular cylindrical hole' described by G.Jones, on Gun Cliff, was descended in 1966 and named 'Stackpole Head Pot', see N/L 54, September 1966.

I come now to the previously unpublished exploration of the final two miles of limestone on the Castlemartin Cliffs. With Army permission gained, John Parker and I met Sergeant Smith with a Landrover, into which we loaded ladders and rope on 27th Sept. 1969. We drove West from Stack Rocks avoiding bits of missiles, all of which, we were assured, were quite safe. We stopped to examine a cave in a sheer cliff at 9120 9466. This is invisible from above, but Parker had spotted it while traversing the coast in a small dinghy with D.A.Parry on 24th May 1969. (Only one other cave, described below, was spotted from the dinghy - the breeze necessitated sailing well away from the cliff due to turbulence - and this method of caving is not recommended.) The cave was about 90ft down and Parker descended a promontory to the SE to get a better look. It seemed to be clay-filled and a descent on a ladder on 13th September 1970 only served to confirm this. Parker again laddered to it, helped by J.Phillips, on 14th November 1970. It seems strange that he should return twice if he was convinced that the large entrance was completely blocked. In any case, the clay deposits could be archaeological.

Proceeding further West along Mount Sion Down an intriguing dry valley (the type called 'Slade' in Gower) is reached, with a second dry valley broaching it from the East. Just seaward of the junction and on the slope facing inland is a pothole and all these structures are very prominent on the aerial photos (541 R.A.F. 543: 1st June: F20"/20,000'). The particular photo I used was numbered 3038 as well, but is undated, the scale being about 6": 1ml. Parker descended a 90ft pitch but found only a sea cave with no development landward. From a beach at 895955 a small cave headed East but became blocked immediately by fill. Another hole heading West had sea water rushing into it. About 50 yards from Linney Head Coastguard Lookout Station was a giant pot at 8843 9580. It had a 120ft pitch which Parker descended. What had appeared to be a cave was an overhang on the inland side and the other side formed a sea-cave into which lots of tank shells had been dumped, plus other waste equipment. A little further North was a rift with a pool of

water above high tide; unfortunately it was used as a waste food dump and we did not descend. The limestone coast extends northwards for another half a mile, descending to sea level at Linney Burrows and Frainslake Sands and this last section we did not explore.

The second hole spotted by Parker on 24th May from his dinghy is at 9539 9344 and we are now East of the stretch delineated in my title. In trying to locate it we found a pot set back from the edge of the cliff. This was descended by Parker on 28th September 1969 and later by R.A.Kennedy in a search for archaeological remains. It falls 60ft to a ledge and on to sea level, with a sterile passage to daylight from the ledge; this being the hole spotted by boatman Parker. Another shaft that he described is at 9463 9387. This is a very deep one of about 120ft with a bonus of 100ft of passage at the bottom containing very red mud. Although only a tiny rift according to Parker, it is heading towards a spectacular collapse doline, 160 yards away, called the 'Sunken Forest', at 9459 9403. This enormous cup-shaped hollow is full of Ash trees and ferns, but very little limestone is visible. The trees are also planed-off level with the ground surface, due to wind action, so it is hardly visible when walking towards it, but something can just be made out on the aerial photos. Another sign of development in this area was a sudden collapse under the wheels of a Landrover at 9473 9425. The vehicle had to be pulled out backwards by a lorry and when I examined the hole it proved to be a fresh, soil and clay filled hollow.

The major collapse feature on 'The Castle' at 9545 9340 can be descended with care on a single 120ft rope, provided that a belay is chosen below the lip. One enters a tunnel, sand-floored at low tide, which provides access to the small beach northwards. There are at least two holes in the cliff around the beach and signs of recent collapse of part of the cliff face.

The most important sign of speleological activity is the large resurgence by Star Rock which is below HWM, but explorable at low tide. A short passage immediately above can be entered (9777 9375), but the system really needs digging out from fissures in the south-west wall of Broadhaven Bay. There is no obvious surface drainage NW of this resurgence and there is a large dry valley at 971940 and an even larger one below Bosherton, artificially flooded to form the western arm of the famous lily pools. Although the 150ft O.D. wave-cut platform in this area does not show many obvious karstic features, there are a few present and even caves only 70ft above O.D. can offer interesting passages and massive stalagmites like those of Ogof Gofan.

A six inch map, the ability and equipment to descend 100ft cliffs and vast quantities of patience in the search should reveal yet further cave systems in this beautiful area of South Wales.

Mel Davies

SARDINIA '80 - GROTTA DELLA SU BENTU, OLIANA.

My first view of Sardinia was from the top deck of the boat which was sailing down a wide channel from the sea, to the port of disembarkation, Olbia. There were dark brown mountains surrounding us everywhere and it was just sunrise. Soon, on the way down the coast-road, we found out how hot it was on this island; driving along in the early morning sun which grew hotter as it gained more elevation. We were to meet up with the Craven Pothole Club who were

already at the cave and into the second week of their stay.

The route to the cave was shown on our map by a big red line so we dutifully followed it; unfortunately, it took us by a rather unconventional way. The journey turned out to be a most impressive exercise; a narrow road which crossed over dried-up river bed after dried-up river bed. The road, or track, was very rough and all the passengers walked while our driver, John Whalley - whose car it was - drove it up a fearful hill. However, at the top our valley came into view: a wide, gaping valley completely enclosed by very steep, high mountains which vibrated in the heat. Notable was the great abundance of plant life; there were small fields scattered about and the further we went, the more trees we saw. Eventually, the proper road joined our track. This road was a lot wider and in better condition, having the look of some engineering about it. The camp was a further two miles, up to the head of the valley and situated either side of a rocky stream bed. The stream bed came from a large cave entrance named 'Sa Ocha', (The Voice), and it is said that before it starts to flow, rumblings can be heard for several days before the great gush of water follows.

Upon arrival we were cordially welcomed by the expedition's Leader, Dave Allenach, and other members of the expedition who were not underground. After the greetings were over, the first job was to find a place to pitch my tent. A brief search revealed an excellent place, shaded from the sun and relatively rock free. There was only one problem, it was right next to the bog. I soon found a more suitable site! Thus ended my first day in Sardinia - and the start of the adventure.

The next day I did not rush underground; rather, I joined a team to explore a ravine some two miles to the West. Negotiating the initial climbs was easy and mostly avoidable; however, the steep walls went straight up for some thousand feet or so. Our purpose was to find a back entrance to Su Bentu as it was thought that the further reaches of the cave ran almost parallel to the ravine and at one point crossed underneath it. We climbed up the sides (where we could) to explore all likely entrances but mostly they were just rock-shelters. One interesting feature of the ravine was a collection of cavities containing fossil formations, yellowed with age. They hung from high terraces at the top of the ravine and also appeared at floor level: some were ten feet high and two feet in diameter, often in groups as though guarding each other, and were not an uncommon sight. At a point further up the ravine it widened considerably with scree slopes sweeping up to the start of the walls; probably once a huge underground chamber. Progress then became difficult with steep walls barring further exploration of the ravine. We determined that a team would have to walk over the mountain and abseil into the ravine, rather than climb up it. This was later done but nothing was found.

After a day spent observing coastal conditions (festering and ogling female topless bathers) I turned my attentions to something more agreeable, to the 'Grotta della Su Bentu' - the Cave of the Wind - 'Bentu' being a local rendition of the word 'Ventu' which is Italian for wind or breeze. The entrance was five minutes walk up an ascending track which wound its way through the scrub; where beautifully-coloured lizards warmed themselves on the rocks and constantly dashed in and out of view. Entering the cave one was met by a wall of cool, fresh air - and silence! Gone was the incessant scraping sound of the crickets. Immediately there was a climb up into a window which emitted a blast of air. This led through to a

chamber, entering on a ledge from which a traverse led to a ladder constructed from scaffold poles! By British standards the cave was already very big but the caving was easy, passing through roomy, dry caverns with neat, level floors and occasionally crawling through very draughty low grovels (not long enough to be called crawls), ultimately arriving at the top of a pitch. This was avoided by a traverse and a climb down through a hole. In all, fifty feet had been descended to the top of the next pitch, a twenty foot ladder (electron) to a ledge followed by a rope climb down. At this point the character of the cave changed as this was the start of the great lake passage; two miles of lakes and deep, wide gour pools which had to be swum over and climbed in and out of - without putting out ones carbide light!

From the start it was sheer pleasure, swimming along in relatively warm water of a greenish-blue colour. The passage was canyon-like in profile with razor-sharp projections above the water line. An easy climb out ended the first lake which was followed immediately by the second (naturally!), in which a French caver was drowned in 1959. This lake was wide with plenty of ledges both above and below the water. After the second lake one begins to lose count so a general description must do: swimming, often two abreast and enjoying a conversation with a companion, or admiring the excellent flowstone formations which sloped into the water. About half-way through there was a section where the water level had dropped and left flowstone formations evenly suspended one under the other with their bottom edges beautifully cut-off level with the old water line. The water in the lakes was stagnant and only the winter floods changed it. The gour section was great fun; climbing down into them, floating across clear water to the other side and then climbing out again. Often they were undercut and this caused difficulties in climbing out, even more so if carrying gear. The water temperature was around 60 degrees F., and very pleasant it was too. There were some dry sections, climbing around dried up gours and traversing into higher levels. It was sometimes dangerous due to a covering of grit on the clean rock which acted like ball-bearings under the feet. The main formations were flowstone with the occasional stalagmite standing sentinel-like on some ledge way up in the roof, looming up in the darkness when lit by the lonely glare of a carbide lamp. After the lake section the passage size increased and we progressed on floors of shingle. The passage often dropped into chambers where we crossed the floor over neat shingle banks and ascended the opposite side via some amusing climbs. Near the underground camp the cave became a super canyon with a crinkled floor formed by rimstone pools which were only half developed on the downstream side, like half a cup, and with walls so thin that, when walked on (unavoidably), they broke under the pressure.

In the camp chamber things were very organised. It was a pleasant site - wide, spacious and draught free. After the camp came the Sahara series; dunes of shingle in an enormous passage and complete with its own oasis, a small gour pool with a stalagmite column acting as the palm tree. Onward, a descent was made through what must be a sump in winter, passing through to a relatively small dry, shattered chamber. By a variety of climbs and thrutches we arrived at a further section of big cave but this time things were different. The passage size grew larger and the floor developed into a scree slope that disappeared into the darkness above us. We started to climb but soon separated and lost contact with each other although our lamps could be seen reflecting from the steep, sheer walls. The chamber was called the 'Frana', which I think means 'landslide', and its height and length were greater than the

width with an estimated circumference of one kilometre. On reaching the top it became obvious that we were on a sort of underground mountain and by following a ridge around the top we could see the other part of the chamber, descending the other side of the mountain. This was really the end of Su Bentu. Returning from the camp, the entrance took one hour and that was at quite a pace. Swimming across those beautiful pools is something that I will never forget, neither will I forget leaving the entrance, usually at night, and being welcomed by a wall of very warm air rich with the fragrance of plants and then trying to cook by the light of a carbide lamp complete with kamikaze moths burning themselves to death in the flame.

At the gateway to the valley in which we were camped there was a gorge with, according to the locals, a cave at the bottom. We travelled to the appropriate spot but the member who had been shown the route down from the road was unfortunately elsewhere so we had to find our own way. All the paths from the road led to the top of an 80ft cliff so S.R.T. was used to abseil down. Having no S.R.T. equipment, I tried to climb down via a gully which was easily followed until 30ft from the bottom where a sheer drop stopped progress. A traverse across to another gully which led to the bottom was followed via a series of ledges protected by trees growing out of the cliff. Down through this vertical forest I went until, about 12ft from the bottom, I decided to traverse across to what looked like an easier way down. Below me was a dense bramble bush waiting to cushion me should I have fallen. Upon reaching a corner I grabbed hold of it when, to my horror, it came away in my hands. I thought my number was up but, with a glancing push, it slipped past grazing my leg in the process. Having watched the little piece of rock thump the ground, I climbed the last terrible feet.

Unfortunately, the only way from there to the open gorge was through those nasty brambles but, being somewhat dazed, the scratches were painless. I then swam across the river and walked up the opposite side to the cave. When I appeared with red scratch marks on my arms and legs I was greeted with an unsympathetic laugh from the team. Having left my lamp, helmet and wet-suit up on top, the exploration of this nameless cave began with a pencil torch. From the entrance a large passage closed down to a small rift which led to a pool which was deep enough to swim for about 15ft. Having attained a friendly ledge I sat like a distracted Gollum awaiting an unsuspecting Hobbit. At last a light appeared some thirty feet up in the roof, it was 'Homo Speleologicie', a species known to venture into these dark environs. My companion followed through and explored further on to a boulder choke while others explored all the remaining passageways, unfortunately all blocked. Upon re-emerging, the problem of the ascent from the gorge presented itself but then an angel appeared from a passage up in the wall and informed us that she had descended from the top by a series of climbs. Thus, our return to the heights was assured albeit with the usual epics; the route was blessed with mounds of B.S. (Bat Guano).

On the de-tackling trip, in the furthest, deepest part of the cave, an expedition member fell 10ft and broke his hand. He, aided by his companion, then climbed a 120ft pitch (which was fortunately against the side) out into the main passage and regained the underground camp from where he was escorted out of the cave by a group who were just preparing to leave. The ease with which he was escorted to the surface owed a lot to his personal stamina. He was taken to hospital where he spent several days having his hand reset - without anaesthetic - and from where he was finally rescued by us,

the staple diet being ravioli in Italian hospitals.

The hospitality in Sardinia was tremendous; I remember once being pulled out of the oppressive afternoon heat into a shepherd's hut where we ate slices of cheese and threw the rind back into the curdling tin, sucked honey from honeycombs and drank the wine (the non-stop pouring variety). It was a great place to go although somewhat hot and excursions were for the mornings only. There were days spent just reading books in the shade and evenings spent swatting mosquitoes, with each one despatched being replaced by another.

We were to leave this beautiful island by the same port at which we arrived so we joined the queue in the evening. Unfortunately the boat did not turn up. Next morning the rising sun lit up the same mountains that I had seen when I arrived. I had a query with my ticket so I ventured to the ticket office. Everything was shut except one little office with a large crowd clamouring around it. A small unshaven official, with a look which became progressively more livid as the crowd thrust their tickets at him for stamping and registering, banged his stamp as hard as possible on the tickets with various muttered oaths. When it came to my turn he had become a visible wreck and my enquiry seemed somewhat trivial so I decided that the brave thing to do was to bugger off!

When leaving an island there is always a feeling of profound regret and that is what I had as I watched the island of Sardinia shrink into the hazy heat of the Mediterranean.

Harvey Lomas

THE LOCATION OF THE BONE CAVE AT CARREG CENNEN CASTLE

In 1970 I was engaged in a re-examination of the more important archaeological caves of Wales, and the Carreg Cennen Castle cave certainly seemed to be one of these, but it took me 10 years to fully unravel its secrets.

In 1907 or thereabouts, a geologist named T.C.Cantrill visited the cave and noticed bone fragments embedded in stalagmite. He hacked out half a cubic foot and took it home for further examination. He realised that there were human teeth in the block but he does not seem to have had a full palaeontological examination made for many years. Eventually a bone expert named E.T.Newton examined the block and identified human remains totalling 2 adults and 2 children, together with a horse incisor with a hole drilled through it. Such ornaments are very rare in British caves and only two other caves in Wales are known to have produced them - Paviland in Gower and Kendrick's Cave in North Wales. However, none of this was published except a mention in the Ammanford Geological Memoirs and in the Carmarthenshire County History, and the exact location of the cave in the Castle rock (SN668191) remained obscure. Visits by me in 1970 and 1971 showed that there were at least nine caves, several of which were potentially archaeological. Fortunately, in 1973, I discovered that there was a 'Cantrill File' stored in the Archaeological Department of the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, and the Keeper, Dr.H.N.Savory, kindly allowed me to borrow it for further study.

The bare facts outlined above were scattered in the file in the form of manuscripts by Cantrill, and by Newton (dated 1915) and it seems likely that Cantrill did not publish because he intended

to excavate further in the cave. He died in 1931 without accomplishing the task, but there was a section in the file drawn by him across the cave in the vicinity of the bone find. Armed with this I visited the site again in May 1980 and concluded that the actual bone cave was the one reached from inside the Castle by descending the covered passageway. Its original entrance had been walled up in medieval times but with small apertures allowed for doves to enter - a traditional source of meat during winter in those days. Examining the cave wall minutely I eventually located a stalagmite deposit and it seemed full of bone fragments, just as Cantrill had described it 70 years ago. I was able to identify three human teeth - a mandibular molar, another molar possibly also mandibular, and an unplaced human tooth only partly visible in its stalagmite bed.

I did not remove anything or dig in the cave, but it is clear that the passage contains valuable archaeological material, undisturbed except for a trench cut in the middle of it to provide access to the end of the cave. Tradition has it that the rimstone pool at the end formed an emergency water supply for the garrison of the Castle. I have suggested to the Ancient Monuments Branch at the Welsh Office, in whose care the Castle lies, that the deposits could be laid out for inspection by the public but I am told that present financial restrictions will not permit this. Meanwhile the cave has a steel gate fitted across the entrance.

Strangely enough, hundreds of people have walked or crawled past the stratified deposits over the years because the Castle, and sometimes its 'dungeon', are traditionally visited by crowds every Whit-Monday. I was there myself in the nineteen-forties! The dating for drilled and pierced animal teeth is somewhat uncertain but Campbell places them in the Upper Palaeolithic, i.e. the Old Stone Age, perhaps 8,000 or more years ago. I have also discovered bones and a stalagmited breccia in another cave in the Castle rock; fortunately the wooded cliffs are scheduled as a Site of Special Scientific Interest so they are being protected.

References: 1. Archaeological discoveries by T.C.Cantrill, H.E.Roese, Archaeologia Cambrensis, CXXVIII, 1979, 147 - 155.
2. The Upper Palaeolithic of Britain, J.B.Campbell, Oxford, 1977.

Mel Davies

CWM DWR UPSTREAM CHOKE

The early era of progress at this site, following the successful dye-test by Pete Smart, was reported in my article in a Newsletter in late 1976.

By the Spring of 1977, women, exams, sailing, increasing danger and the unutterable tedium of repeated trips through the crawl had sapped interest to the extent that I abandoned the venture. Around Easter 1978 Bruce and the Flaherty started to persue a rival venture parallel to the choke passage with some success, but a few nasty experiences seem to have put them off as well. Easter 1979 saw another rival venture, this time at the shakehole which absorbed all that dye of Pete Smart's. This dig became a cave - Twll Gwynt Oer - within a few months and then stopped at a sump. The challenge was made! Would the Upstream Choke dig expose the missing kilometre first? Reinspired, Summer '79 saw a new assault on the nasty end of the dig. Although Phil Rust was moved to write - 'Mortification Rules O.K!' - as part of a Logbook report, fair

progress was made in a few trips.

It was not until the Summer of 1980, with the more urgent challenge of the mechanised assault on Twll Gwynt Oer looming, that we really pushed the Cwm Dwr end hard. With a series of trips in quick succession progress was such that Pete Francis wrote, 'the whole choke feels as if it is finishing', (it is not clear whether the verb 'to finish' is used here in the transitive sense of 'providing a coup de grace' or not!). By September we were making such rapid progress that the bang wire had to be lengthened and the trip through the choke took a good half of the trip in from the surface. However, in October, having reached a room-sized chamber over the stream with no clear way on, I had to write 'progress could be slow for a while' in the logbook report. Since then we have pushed on and have made a little headway. Now that the Summer is past and the temptation of concentrating on sunny surface digs is gone, a new phase of assault can commence.

We have been hampered at times in the past 18 months by lack of help, partly I fear due to the largely justified reputation that the choke had gained previously of being 'a horror'. It is true that I instructed Pete Cardy not to touch first the walls, then the roof and finally the floor in no more than three successive breaths: it is true that Bob Hill nearly got stuck, by thrashing boulders down onto his outsize feet; but given a reasonably calm and circumspect technique, access to the sharp end is as safe as many other chokes in the cave. Nothing inspires a digger more than offers of help so, as no project seems brighter than this one, please help to build on the epic efforts already made by the freaks and masochists who have pushed this dig as far as it has already gone.

Bob Hall