

## Mick Day, an Obituary

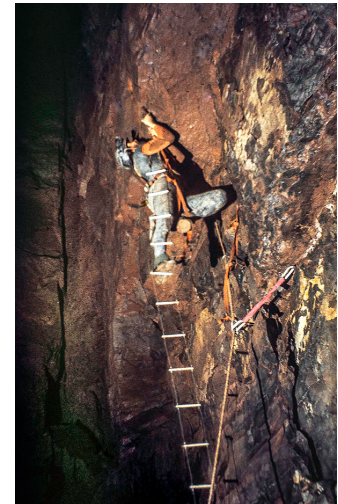
Mick was a superb climber and caver, a passionate and eminent entomologist, lover of old, luxury Rover cars, astute and superbly effective chairman, good company and a friend to many. For years he was a central figure in the South Wales Caving Club and became a central figure in the caving scene nationally. His passing marks a huge loss to the caving world.

He was born in Coulsdon, Surrey, in 1942. After his schooldays at Reigate Grammar, he took a year out, working, and then studied zoology at Cardiff University. Following graduation he continued there as a postgraduate researcher. He was an active member of the Cardiff University Climbing and Caving Club, initially as a talented climber but he soon took up caving. He first met Judy, his future wife, on a trip in Lesser Garth Cave, when he apparently stepped on her glasses!



Mick and Judy joined the South Wales Caving Club in October 1966. They were still active with the Cardiff University club but they quickly became core members of SWCC, contributing to all aspects of club life. As their family grew, weekends were spent in 'Married Quarters', now Family Quarters, with their daughters Caitlin and Ceinwen also enjoying club life with other members' children. Penwyllt, as many 'Club Children' will testify, presents many adventure opportunities. They too were introduced to caving by Mick, no doubt impressing their schoolfriends with tales of daring. A close bond developed with others using 'Married Quarters', particularly the Cardy and Jopling families. Many long-lasting friendships were formed and valued over the decades that followed.

It was a spectacular time to join SWCC, with miles of new cave being discovered in Dan yr Ogof in 1966 and Ogof Ffynnon Ddu in 1967. Mick participated fully in exploration and found significant new passages in both caves. In OFD 2, in 1967, with Idris Williams, he climbed from the First River Chamber and discovered an extensive series of passages. In the same year Mick, supported by Bob Hall, scaled Fault Aven, using pitons, and discovered the 2000 feet of passage now known as the Fault Aven Series. In 1968 he took part in a five-day camp in the far reaches of Dan yr Ogof, during which his climbing skills led him to discover a series of large passages above the Mostest and others in the Pinnacle Series.



On a 1969 caving expedition to Italy, the team travelled in an old Luton Bedford lorry. Whilst Mick was driving through Germany, the coupling disintegrated between the injector pump and engine. They were marooned on the side of a busy autobahn, with no breakdown insurance. Harvey Lomas recalls that Mick calmly assessed the situation and with the few tools available he cut two pieces of sheet metal from the floor of the drivers cab and, along with a piece of wetsuit, a piece of wood and a baked-bean tin, he made a coupling. This did the job until they reached Munich, where a genuine part was in stock. In Italy, exploring with David Judson, Mick pushed a climb in the Grotta di Monte Cucco, at the time the second deepest cave in Italy, and discovered extensive passages and a huge chamber, now named the Salone di Luna, which rivals the Main Chamber of Gaping Ghyll in size.



For many caving trips Mick wore his bizarre but favoured caving garb of long johns, Aran sweater and an ex coal mine cardboard helmet that became soft when wet! It served him well.

He enjoyed the social side of SWCC and a highlight of a Saturday evening singalong was often Mick's masterful and memorable singing of the many verses concerning the salacious exploits of a lady from ancient times. He was also noted for his energetic and polished dancing at the club ceilidhs!

When he joined SWCC, Mick was an entomology researcher at Cardiff University and quickly became an expert in his specialist field. This led to a position at the Natural History Museum where he pursued his field with passion. For a four-month insect-collecting expedition to South West Africa in 1972 Mick used his vehicle experience and engineering talent to lead the conversion of a large ex-army 4x4 truck into a mobile laboratory, with some of the work done at Penwyllt. For this they bought an ex-army, four-wheel drive, Bedford "gun tractor" and fitted it with the cab of an army "green goddess" fire engine, all for less than £350. The completed mobile laboratory was shipped to Cape Town and the expedition then travelled through four countries, South Africa, Namibia, Angola and Botswana, including the Namib and Kalahari deserts. They covered 7,500 miles in all, and discovered a large number of species that were new to science. A number of these now carry Latin names that contain '*dayi*' in recognition of Mick's role in their discovery. There were other entomological trips too, taking Mick to Greece, Brunei, Madagascar, Seram in Indonesia and Australia. He also managed to convince his family to take several holidays on Rhodes, so that he could collect a rare insect! Mick's professional interests in entomology drew to a close about the time when, in 2006, he and Judy moved from Harrow to Pen y Cae, just down the hill from SWCC.

In the early years, suitable transport from London to SWCC was provided by oldish but fast and luxurious Rover cars in the 'P4' series, which Mick lovingly maintained, again doing much of the work at Penwyllt. Many times Mick would work on the old Rovers at the club, often in cord trousers and sandals, to ensure he and the family would get home safely. The first one was a Rover 75 which was acquired from an uncle. On its demise it was replaced with another, and then another, a Rover 100, which he converted into an estate, largely using aluminium sheet, handy angle, and pop rivets! He seems to have transferred his favourite engine from one car to another.



Mick became SWCC Chairman in 1970, after only three and a half years as a member. He was highly effective, diplomatic, incisive and astute and when required he could exert a commanding presence. He was re-elected annually, with acclaim, until he stood down in 1976.

He went on to play a major role in the organisation of British caving. From 1976-1984 he was Biological Recorder on the Council of the British Cave Research Association. Then, for twenty years, he was Chairman of the National Caving Association until in 2004 he oversaw its transformation into the British Caving Association, continuing as its Chairman until he stood down in 2009.

Jenny Potts writes: "He did so much for the NCA and also for the BCA in its early days and steered us through difficult times with patience and good humour. He dealt with 'officialdom' from outside the caving world wisely and ensured that the views of cavers were respected. We owe a great debt of gratitude for his work on behalf of cavers over so many years."

In similar vein, Nick Williams writes: "Mick was a huge asset to the UK caving community and steered us unerringly through various difficulties and crisis with good humour, wisdom, modesty and great diplomatic skill. I think few cavers outside of NCA/BCA council and his immediate circle of friends truly understood how valuable he was to us all."

From 2011 until his passing in 2020 Mick was Honorary President of the British Caving Association, which was a clear indication of the esteem in which he was held nationally.

Mick was also the first chairman of the Pwll Du Cave Management Group, which manages access and conservation in relation to Ogof Draenen and the surrounding area. He held the position from 1996 to 2017, when he stepped down due to failing eyesight and gradually deteriorating health. Sue Mabbett recalls that he chaired PDCMG with great skill, through its various up and downs, and was respected by all members of the group. He ensured everyone's opinions were heard, many of which were very disparate so that at times he had a challenging job on his hands.

Mick was for many years an honorary Vice-President of the South Wales Caving Club. His many friends sought his advice, wisdom, and knowledge which he freely gave. He contributed a huge amount to caving and to the organisation of caving UK-wide and is assured of a prominent place in caving history.

*Compiled by Jem Rowland and Fred Levett, with contributions from: Caitlin Bones, Bob Hall, Marj and Brian Jopling, Harvey Lomas, Sue Mabbett, Joan Mawson, John S. Noyes, Jenny Potts, Nick Williams.*

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