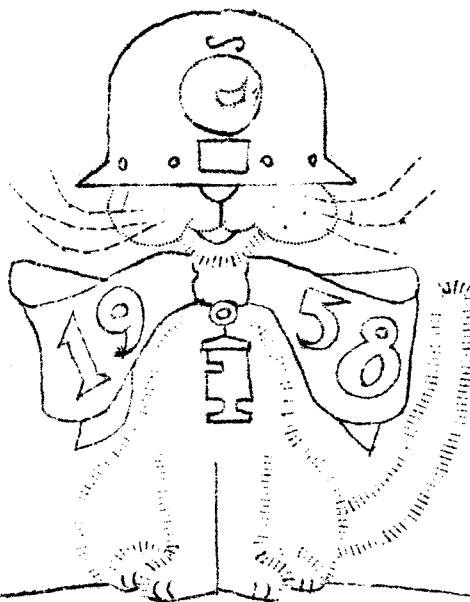


SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB

NEWSLETTER

No. 22.

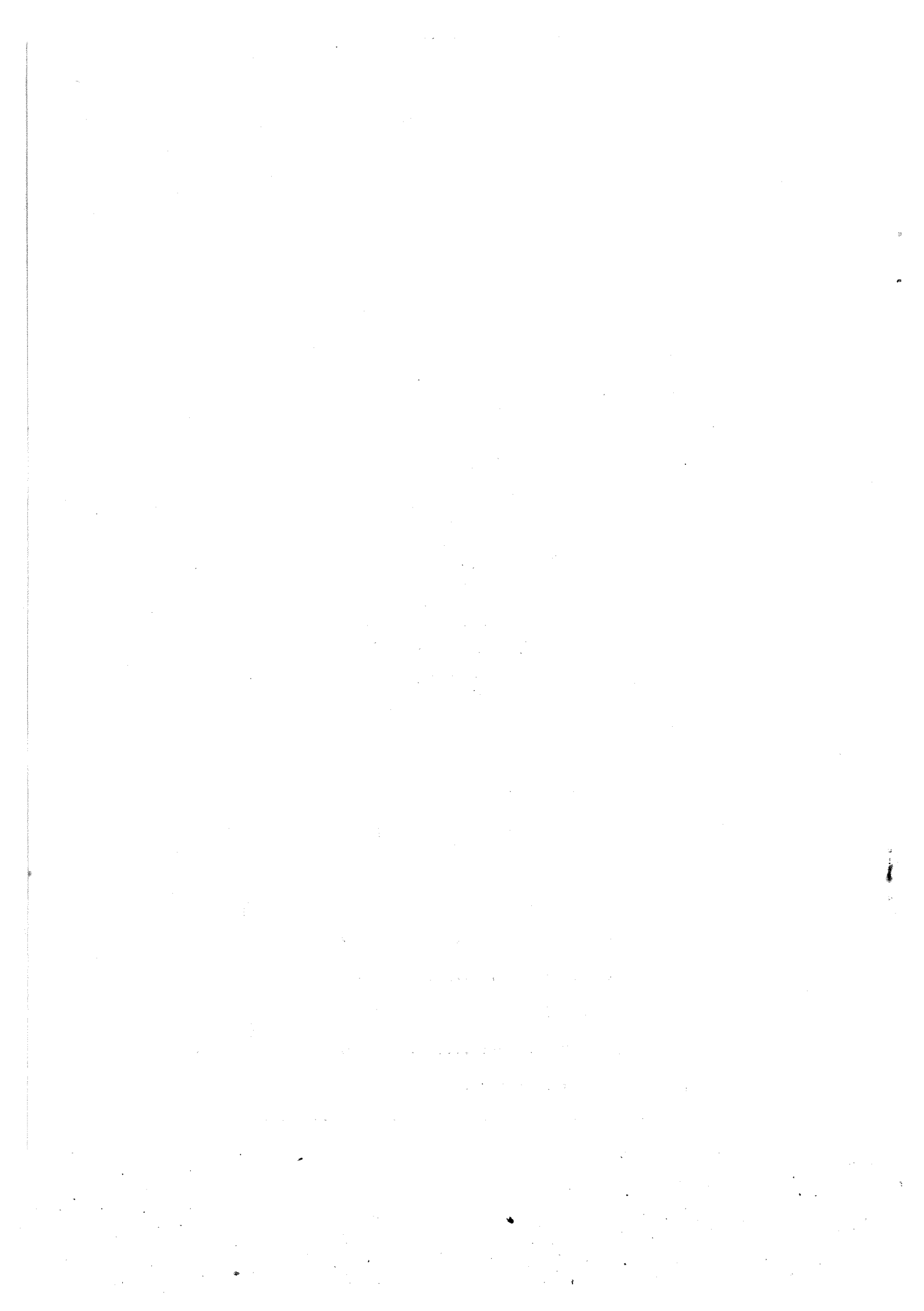
JANUARY 1958



A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE

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SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB

Number 22

January 1958

1. CLUB NEWS

The Editor would like to take the opportunity of wishing all members a Happy New Year, and hopes that many who are to him only names on the list will make a resolution to appear at H.Q. at least once in 1958.

ANNUAL DINNER

The Annual Dinner of the Club was held at the Angel Hotel on Saturday, November 2nd. 1957, and some 50 members and friends, barely recognisable to one another in best bibs and tuckers, were present. After an excellent meal our chairman, Dr. Edward Aslett, introduced our president, Dr. F.J. North, who gave a short address which included a description of caves in Tanganyika, and a piece of verse by an early speleologist which appears again later in this issue. Mr. Arthur Hill then obliged the company with his celebrated monologue "Cardiff Trams", after which the meeting retired to the room next door for a drink and a chat.

The British Dental Association happened to be meeting in the Angel at the same time, and one of our lady members remarked that it might be possible to get quite a long way with a discussion on cavities before realising you were with the wrong party!

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following New Members to the Club-

Miss. K. Benson-Evans, Trefriw, 103, Merthyr Road Bridgend, Glam.
J.H. Edwards, 10, Pantygwlydr Rd., Uplands, Swansea.
B.W. Fenn, 113, Sherwood Rd., Hall Green, Birmingham 28.
W.C. Ford, 216, Caerleon Rd., Newport, Mon.
F/O Peter Foreman R.A.F. St. Athans, Barry, Glam.
Melvyl Davies, 18 Tymynydd, Pontnewydd, Cwmbran, Mon.
Miss. J.A. Nobel, 2, The Crescent, Crookham Village, Nr. Aldershot, Hants.
Miss. M.S. Nutt, 116a, Rookery Rd., Handsworth, Birmingham 21.
W.R. Stephens, 28, Harriet St., Trecynon, Aberdare, Glam.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

A.W. Ashwell, 57, Humberston Drive, Leicester.
T. Davies, 31, Windsor Rd., Caerphilly Glam.
C.L. Devenish, Washingpool, Chilcote, East Harrington, Wells Somerset.
P.I.W. Harvey (Mr. & Mrs.) Llandough Castle, Llandough, Nr. Cowbridge, Glam.
W.B. Mills, Druid House, Middleton St., Llandrindod Wells, Rads.
Ashford W. Price, Abercrave House, Abercrave, Swansea Valley.
L.A. Hawes, 26a, Kings Road, Fleet, Hants.

CORRECTION OF ADDRESS

D.T. Gregory, 24 not 20 Hawthorn Avenue, Uplands, Swansea.

CONGRATULATIONS

To Mr. and Mrs. D.T. Gregory, on the birth of a son, Christopher.
To our Treasurer on his recent engagement to Judith ('Jan') Nobel.

BEST WISHES

To Denis Kemp on his future expedition to the Himalayas.

THANKS

To Mary Boughton for her gift to the Club of 100 ft. of nylon line.
To our H.Q. neighbour, Mr. Jones. for the gift of an armchair - much appreciated both by exhausted cavers and also those who are just plumb lazy!

OGOF FFYNNON DDU - LEADERS

At the last Committee Meeting, it was decided that at the request of the Secretary, each leader whose name appears on the list shall be required to lead at least three trips a year into Ogof Ffynnon Ddu.

Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Powell, leaders officially taking parties on tours of the cave will not in future be required to pay the usual entrance fee. This relaxation does not however apply to leaders accompanying Club working parties, or on private jaunts.

2. STEMBRIDGE CAVE GOWER Discovery of New Passages

For several months the three of us have been working in Stembridge Cave and can now report the discovery of about two hundred feet of new passages some thirty-five feet below the old cave.

As many members of the S.W.C.C. will no doubt know Stembridge Cave has been considered in the past to be neither of archaeological nor of speleological interest. It consisted of an entrance passage, six feet wide and high enough to walk upright comfortably, extending for twenty feet, at which point a tight opening led to a further twenty feet of crawl which ended in a steepish stalagmited slope where two or three thick and dumpy stalagmites showed through the loose rocks which covered the floor of the crawl to within about a foot of the roof. At the top of the slope was a small crevice which could neither be enlarged nor passed. (So much for the story that an old man, now living had actually walked through the cave and had come out at Cheriton, two miles away on the coast!)

This describes the cave as we saw it five or six years ago. We were not at all impressed at that time and wrote it off as a dead loss - apart from a nice curtain which rang musically when struck. (Some vandal has since broken it off.)

However, some months ago and for no earthly reason, we felt strongly that we should go back there. In the meantime the property had changed hands (it now belongs to Miss Knudsen) and we were both amazed and horrified to see the amount of rubbish that had accumulated in the cave during the intervening years - cans, bottles, boxes, boots: even a bedstead of sorts and a bicycle. A horrible mess! Yet having

somewhat gingerly picked our way through this debris and re-explored the cave we still felt it would be well worth while to clear it out. This was a pure hunch and quite inexplicable. Anyway, we managed eventually to chuck all the rubbish to one side where it was subsequently buried by the results of our excavations which were prevented from overflowing by a retaining wall.

When we first started work the crawl itself was four feet wide at most and the vertical sides little more than a foot in height but after all the loose rocks and general debris had been removed we gained considerable space - four feet of height at least and an extra two or three feet in width. Moreover we had uncovered a small waterworn tunnel to the right but this closed down after eight feet. The left hand wall proved to be very heavily and, were it cleaned, quite attractively coated with flowstone which extended right across the floor and down the small tunnel.

At one point however, the fill seemed less solid and on digging there for a short while we saw a black space beyond. A good omen, but our efforts to enlarge this place were unluckily frustrated by the presence of a large stalagmited boulder. Thus we were forced to the conclusion that we must break through the stalagmited floor to by-pass this obstacle.

This was quite a job. Even when we did finally manage to break through the floor we found that we had to contend with the fact that the hole could only be enlarged and deepened by picking (in both senses) everything out by hand and working head downwards in the hole. However our aim was eventually achieved and we reached the cavity where, although it was almost hidden by the fill, the top of a further waterworn passage could be seen. A passage moreover that seemed a reasonable size, when sufficient space was cleared to gain access (a tight fit but just manageable) we found there was a climb down of seven feet. But did it go? Not on your life! From inside this passage it now became clear that we were working down the side of a huge fill of boulders and smaller stuff which filled the entire entrance passages of the cave. It was only by the sheerest good fortune that this new passage had not become completely filled, too. As it was, several large boulders at the entrance had, so to speak, saved our bacon and ample room was left to work inside the passage. Moreover the rocks littering the floor had not become involved with the later stalagmite flow and so their removal was all the easier.

After working there for some time that most welcome sound was heard - the echo of a pebble falling some distance below. This naturally heartened us considerably and our renewed efforts soon uncovered a gap in the boulders. When widened this allowed us to see that there was a drop of at least six feet into what appeared to be a small chamber. Unfortunately for us this seemed to be immediately under the boulder choke so work had to proceed cautiously, to say the least.

Happily our anxiety was allayed as soon as we were able to squeeze through the hole we had made, for the tiny chamber thus entered was large enough for two to stand upright and the sides and roof were so thickly coated with calcite that all semblance of the under side of a boulder choke was lost and the result was safety personified.

In addition, to the right, was a sight that made all our trouble worth while - a sheer pitch going down farther than the light of our lamps could illuminate and increasing in size as it became deeper. Its depth eventually proved to be twenty-five feet. This pitch led to the interesting series of new passages, all of which we were able to explore without further digging.

The lower regions consist of a main passage ninety feet long and several very tight rift passages branching off at right angles. What is so particularly interesting about this cave is that they are so unlike the typical passages found in other Gower caves for they are twenty-five feet or more in height. The main passage is up to four or five feet wide. Most of the walls are covered with flowstone which is still active and some small but attractive curtains are found in places. Of actual stalactites there is only one group in the cave - small and white

Tiny rimstone pools occur all over the place and there are two really interesting features in the main passage; firstly a lovely seven-tiered flowstone cascade of a fine orange colour, twelve feet high, (unfortunately, because of its position completely unphotographable); secondly a most unusual floor in one area which appears to be of crystalline mud in the form of a mass of tiny rosettes (maybe not the perfect speleological description but the best we can do at the moment!) which even projects from the side in places to form a sort of shelf well above the surface of the more solid floor beneath.

A mass of fallen boulders blocks the end of the main passage and here again they are fantastically coated with stalagmite. A climb of ten feet up through the boulders brings one to a captivating miniature passage to the left which runs straight as a die into the distance and whose floor is of rimstone pools. Spaced at intervals are absolutely symmetrically placed formations bang in the middle of the tunnel.

Most exciting of all is a passage leading steeply up for fifteen feet from the main passage entirely covered with flowstone from which one emerges into the "Pool Chamber". This small place has an actual floor area of, I suppose, less than twenty square feet and almost all of this space is taken up with a pool yet the walls soar upwards to a height of twenty feet and there are some most attractive formations in the shape of flows and wall drapery of intermingled colours. One end of the chamber is the usual high and narrow rift which is almost blocked by stalagmite flows; the other can be climbed without undue difficulty although almost vertical. At the top is a finely shaped column and several stalagmites, one of which forms a most useful belay when roping down. By climbing here a low semi circular passage is reached which winds about for a short way until it, too, becomes blocked by a boulder fall. This, by the way, is the only passage in the cave of this section - low and arched - a sharp contrast to the tight and high passages elsewhere.

There appears to have been a major collapse of rock around the foot of the twenty-five foot pitch and unfortunately all the massive boulders are too heavy to shift otherwise there is a possibility that a way on or down could have been found below. So far we have failed to find an extension to the cave though we have

excavated in one place and tunnelled forward to reach a very shattered region; one end of the main passage becomes too narrow to penetrate; the other is blocked by a boulder fall. A pity.

Small though the cave is yet it now becomes (at any rate to us) one of the most interesting of Gower Caves, which as a general rule are lacking in active formations. In addition the fact that a rope ladder is required to reach the lower regions makes it more sporting than the majority of caves in this area - apart from Bovehill Pot.

The Taylors.

3. NEWTON CAVE, SCURLAGE, GOWER

A camping weekend in Gower on October 13th., led to certain information from a farm worker about a hole in the bottom of a pit in the middle of a field where he worked. Further enquiry revealed that the hole had been entered once, so far as he knew, by the farmer, but he did not know how many miles he had penetrated and the entrance was now blocked by a corrugated iron fox deterrent. We also managed to obtain sufficient directions to enable us to find the place (Newton Farm)

Take the main Port Eynon road past Stouthall Hospital for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and on the second of two left-hand bends (the last bend before Scurlage), turn right across a concrete bridge and through a gate. Follow the track along the edge of fields through two more gates. From here the track on the 1" map continues straight on, but this is derelict (and unnoticeable anyway). The present track bears left across the middle of a field and in about 300 yards there is a group of trees in a depression on the right. (NGR.454 882). This is an old quarry and in the base of the cliff is the barricaded entrance of the cave. Newton Farm is another $\frac{1}{4}$ mile along the track, but no sign of human life was in evidence when we visited it, so we opened up the cave nevertheless.

The obstruction is easily removed to reveal a low passage in the bottom of a joint. About 10ft., in is a T-junction at a cross joint. To the left a dirty stal. flow comes down to within a few inches of the dry mud floor, and the opening seems to fill up a few feet beyond. To the right the floor is really a pile of dry mud; it is possible to worm one's way up the slope for about 12ft., and get one's head into a small chamber. The floor of the chamber is the top of the mud pile, which has been flattened out to form what must be a fashionable dining-out place, to judge by the feathers, bones and other remains of sumptuous meals, lying about. Beyond the chamber and mudpile, two narrow passages of possible crawling dimensions seem to lead downward. The mud shouldnt be too difficult to remove, so, if any-one feels like joining a dig.....

S.C.L. Phillips

4. FOUR IN A HUSKY
or
May It Never Boil Again

"The buzzers will get you" - "Only idiots go to the Vercors in August" - "You'll have terrible stomach ache old man, it'll ruin your holiday" - "Watch out for those French drivers" - and so on. It was with such good wishes from our friends that my wife, Mary Boughton, David Hunt, myself and the Husky landed at Le Touquet after a bumpy air crossing during a thunderstorm.

We were off - we were going to speed smoothly over those long French roads southwards through Rouen, Le Mans, Tours, Poitiers and so to Montignac in the Dordogne. We did get off but not smoothly nor did we speed. The smoothness was decided by the condition of the French roads (try the big-dipper at Abbeville) and the speed was retarded by the weight in the car, the quality of the petrol and the fact that the cylinder head gasket had blown. Try asking for cylinder head gasket cement in French and watch the faces of the inhabitants - most amusing and frustrating. However we got it and thanks to the mechanical ability of David Hunt, we soon had it repaired.

Montignac - a lovely spot - excellent camp site and a photogenic town. David Hunt and David Jenkins hereafter known as Dai Negative and Dai Positive, enjoyed themselves wandering around the picturesque backstreets in the early morning and with many an - "Ah! ah! that one nearly got you" they dodged the refuse thrown out of the bedroom windows. Near Montignac is the Cave of Lascaux which proved to be all that it has been cracked up to be. The paintings are wonderful and it is well worth any extra mileage to see them. Lascaux was also our first experience of French queues and having watched those who had come ten minutes after us go in well before us we adopted shock tactics and soon got in. Incidentally don't think that your health is rapidly deteriorating in the cave when you find yourself panting for breath. It is just that the place is air-tight and that there are big boxes of 'silica jelly' everywhere to keep the atmosphere dry.

Lascaux to Soulliac and then by La Cave to Rocamadour. By all means go there and see it - it is fantastic - but it is just like Matlock on August Sunday except that the main street in Matlock is about twice as wide and there are no narrow gates to drive through. Our next stop was Padirac to see the show cave there. Here is a 'must' for everyone even if only to admire the fine engineering of the lifts and steps leading down into the cave. The cave itself like all French caves defies description except that mention must be made of the magnificent gour at the end of the tourist section. This is about eighteen feet high!!!

Having spent the night at Gramat which proved to be a lovely little town and also the place where we got the best meal of the whole holiday we drove the next day to the Mediterrainean. This was a fascinating journey and our glimpses of the Tarn Gorges made us want to return to Millau. Palavas on the sunny 'Med'. How shall I describe it - blue, shimmering in the sunlight - wonderful men and beautiful women - humbug! The latter were there all right but it was neither blue nor shimmering. It was inky black and quite the worse thunderstorm I have ever

experienced. It rained, it thundered, it did everything, the car was up to the axles in mud and Dai Positive suffered from French stomach. It was a wet party that packed up early the next morning and set off for Le Grau du Roi stopping on the way for a swim. The previous night's troubles were soon forgotten in Le Grau du Roi and Les Aigues Mortes for here was a photographers paradise. The sun came out and we were soon gloriously warm again.

Northwards through Nimes to Pont St Esprit where we turned into the Ardeche. This was just about the wildest country we had seen - bare limestone and scrub. We stopped at Aven Marzel which proved to be a very pretty cave and well worth a visit. Our camp that night was at Vallon Pont d'Arc and it turned out to be a most beautiful spot.

Orgnac - I doubt if any one of us will ever forget that name. We had previously arranged to meet Dr. Robert de Joly, President - Fondateur of the Speleological Society of France who had promised to show us around. Accordingly we arrived at the entrance and soon we were enjoying his fascinating company. After lunch we met him outside the cave this time dressed in full caving gear (it was 80° in the shade), and soon we descended the tunnel which led into the main cave. What a sight - a forest of stalagmites which has to be seen to be believed. We slowly made our way through the tourist sections gazing in wonderment at all we saw. At the end was a railing to which de Joly tied our rope and then, in front of an admiring party of French tourists we made our descent to the floor of the chamber below. Let me hasten to say the honour of the S.W.C.C. was upheld and no one fell down. The chamber which makes Starlight Chamber look like a bulge in a passage contains two stalagmites which are just about ninety feet in height. Having passed through the chamber we were somewhat surprised when de Joly dropped on to his hands and knees and looked over what appeared to be a trench cut in the floor. We did the same and what a sight met our eyes. Here was the famous 'Canyon', perfect in every respect, we looked into a miniature Grand Canyon which water has fashioned out of mud.

Following this Dai Positive described a none too graceful glide down a steep mud-bank which we were supposed to be going up, but, in due course, we reached the room of the Phantom Ship. This turned out to be an enormous stalagmite which had fallen on its side giving appearance of the hull of a ship, while on its back had grown three more stalagmites to form the masts. As Dai Negative said at the time, "there is probably more 'stal' there than in the whole of South Wales put together."

Back again in the tourists part we began to descend to the North Room. Dai Negative discovered that Orgnac has little or no water for carbide users. The matter was attended to! Having crossed a wretched little traverse we reached the North Room which has so many helictites in it that it just is about impossible to sort them out. Here, too, were beautiful white gours looking like pine forests covered with snow.

We returned to the surface, tired but very, very satisfied with our trip

and after thanking our host who had been so kind and patient with us we returned to Vallon.

By way of contrast the next day saw us boating down the Ardeche Gorge for some twenty-two miles. The Photographers had an excellent time except while passing through the nudist camp, and the swimming was grand. Mention must be made of the method by which the return journey was made. To be transported back to Vallon were six boats, two canoes, eight guides, and twenty-two passengers. To pull this circus was one car of a very uncertain age. The canoes were lashed to the top of the car, the boats tied to three trailers all of which were hitched to one another, the eight guides and driver packed themselves in the car and the twenty-two passengers climbed into the boats on the trailers. It actually moved and this triumphant spectacle made its way slowly back to Vallon, a sight enough to give a British policeman nightmares for a month.

We left Vallon with regret and with every hope of returning there one day. Our route now took us over the Rhone and into the Vercors in fact to Villard de Lans where we made our camp. It was here that we discovered that we were getting rather high in the world and when the sun went down we were hard put to it to keep warm. The Jenkins part of the foursome were very glad they had packed a couple of hot water bottles at the last moment. Having spent longer in the Ardeche than we had intended there was no time left to visit any of the caves in the Vercors and apart from a quick look in at La Luire that was the end of our caving part of the holiday. However we saw enough of the region to make us want to go back there and this we have every intention of doing.

Now we left the limestone and the remaining days quickly sped by as we moved through the Alps stopping at La Grave and Briancon and then crossing over the border to Susa in Italy. This was done because it had been our intention to have a photographic treat in crossing back over the Mont Cenis Pass. For the second time the weather was unkind to us and we saw nothing but mist and boiling radiators.

Our journey back took us down the Arc Valley which had not yet recovered from the disastrous floods earlier in the year, and then northwards through Chambery, Challon-sur-Soane and so at last to Le Touquet. The car had travelled just under 2,000 miles on roads which were in many cases shocking and on petrol which is far below standard. It could be said that we had attempted too much. In some respects this may be true, but, on the other hand, it was as far as myself and my wife are concerned, our first trip abroad and, as a result of our wanderings, we have a very clear idea of those parts we wish to visit again - Dordogne, Lot, Tarn, Vercors and above all, the Ardeche.

P.S. What buzzers?

David Jenkins.

5. POETS CORNER

Dr. North, our President, has kindly sent the 'Newsletter' the poem which he presented to the Annual Dinner. It relates to Pooles Hole near Buxton.

From "The Wonders of the Peake" by Charles Cotton. 1681.

"At a high Mountains foot....
Under its Base there is an overture
Which Summer Weeds do render so Obscure,
The careless Traveller may pass and ne're
Discover, or suspect an entry there....

"Men bowing low take leave of days fair light,
To crowd themselves into the Womb of Night,
Through such a low and narrow pass, that it
For Badgers, Wolves, and Foxes seems more fit;...
But having fifteen paces crept or more,
Through pointed stones and dirt upon all four,
The gloomy Grotto lets men upright rise
Although they were six times Goliath's size.
There, looking upward, your astonish'd sight
Beholds the glory of the sparkling light...

But here a roaring Torrent bids you stand,
Forcing you climb a Rock on the right hand,
Which hanging, pent-house-like does overlook
The dreadful Channel of the rapid Brook
So deep, and black...
Over this dangerous Precipice you crawl,
Lost if you slip, for if you slip you fall...
Whilst, every step you take, your Guides do show
In the uneven Rock the uncouth shapes
Of Men, of Lions, Horses, Dogs, and Apes:
But so resembling each the fancied shape
The Man might be the Horse, the Dog the Ape.

"And straight just in your way a Stone appears
Which the resemblance of a Haycock bears
Some four foot high, and beyond that a less
Of the same Figure; which do still increase
In height, and bulk, by a continual drop,
Which upon each distilling from the top,
And falling still exactly on the Crown,...
So that in time, they would be Tall enough,
If there were need, to prop the hanging Roof,
Did not sometimes the curious Visitors,
To steal a Treasure is not justly theirs,
Break off much more at one injurious Blow
Than can again in many Ages grow."

6. CORRESPONDENCE

The membership of the S.W.C.C. fluctuates at present at round about the hundred. Of this figure, perhaps twenty make a regular contribution to the Newsletter in the form of articles, which leaves some eighty members from whom we never hear in writing. Some may not be able to attend Club functions, or may feel that a full scale article is beyond their powers of writing; but nevertheless we would be glad to hear from them, and for them this heading is intended. So come now! the field is yours - whether you want to express an opinion, disagree, criticise, or send greetings - make a resolution to put pen to paper at least once this year. Remember - your contributions keep the Newsletter going.

Hon. Secretary.....D.Jenkins, Dinmore, Dyffryn Rd., Llandrindod Wells, Rads.
Hon. Treasurer.....L.A. Hawes, 26a. Kings Rd., Fleet. Hants.
Hon. Editor.....B. de Graaf, 5, Tai-north, Pennorth, Brecon.
C.R.O. & Tackle Manager...G.L. Clissold, Caravan, c/o Plasnewydd, Llwddcoed, Aberdare,
Glam.