

SOUTH WALES CAVING CLUB NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 29

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AUGUST 1959.

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1. CLUB NEWS.

NEW H.Q. DEVELOPMENT FUND.

The Hon. Treasurer reported at a recent Committee Meeting that prior to any deductions being made for materials, the appeal for funds that he made in the February 1959 Newsletter has so far raised £121.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Let's see, that works out at just about £1 per member. At least, it might if everyone had responded to Les's appeal, and £121 had been the resulting total. It doesn't sound so clever, though, when it is realised that this £121 has been contributed by exactly 23 members. No, that's not a misprint: TWENTY-THREE members.

The membership figure given by the Hon. Secretary at the A.G.M. last Easter was 113. Some of these are joint memberships: others we can understand may be students who are still finding it difficult to make ends meet. But that doesn't explain the fact that there must be a good 70 who have still not looked into their purses. That £121 is dwindling fast: it's gone to buy cement, sand, chippings, drains, electrical fittings; and what's left will soon be swallowed up by the plumbing that will make this H.Q. a pleasure to stay in. "Never use the H.Q." did someone say? Well, haven't you, as a member, a stake in seeing the Club progress from strength to strength: and ensuring

that, even though you may not be active now, there is something for future members to look forward to?

So come on now, whether you're an active member or not, follow the example of the stalwart 23 and dig deep into your pockets. At the same rate we could have another £350 in the kitty to complete the good work.

WORK ON THE NEW H.Q.

In order to co-ordinate progress on work at the new cottages, the Committee has decided to organise a series of monthly working weekends at which it is hoped, having been given due notice, members will turn up prepared to forego caving and lend a hand on building work. Dates are as follows:-

October 3rd - 4th.
October 31st - Nov 1st.
November 28th - 29th.
Christmas weekend.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS.

Dr. F.J. North, 19 Charget Road, Cardiff.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:-

M. Duerden, c/o Taylor Woodrow, Dowlais Top, Nr. Merthyr.
Mrs. E.A. Ashwell, 57 Humberstone Drive, Leicester.
J.R. Riden, 14 Llwyn-y-Grant Terrace, Penylan, Cardiff.
N. Jones, 4 Heol-y-Felin, Rwbina, Cardiff.

O.F.D. LEADERS LIST.

Bill Birchenough has been elected to the O.F.D. Leaders List.

B.N.S. RALLY.

John Dyer, Secretary of the British Nylon Spinners Caving Club, sends us the following notice of the forthcoming rally to be held by the B.N.S.C.C. at the end of September. Members who are interested in attending should write to him at

Speleology Sub-Section,
British Nylon Spinners,
Sports and Social Club,
Pontypool,
Mon.

Tel: Pontypool 420 Ext. 146.

stating which functions they wish to attend, and if going into Agen Allwedd, whether they would like an EASY (Main Chamber), MODERATE (Turkey and Formation Chamber) or SEVERE (Summertime Series) trip.

The British Nylon Spinners Caving Club is holding a meeting at the B.N.S. Clubhouse, Pontypool on the weekend of 26th Sept. 1959, the object being to collect together information about recent caving developments in the Mendip and South Wales areas.

The programme is shown below. Any interested persons may attend both caving trips. For the meeting on the Saturday evening however, the B.N.S.C.C. secretary must receive the names and addresses of all visitors before 1st Sept. 1959. This is owing to regulations under which the club is licensed.

A general invitation is extended to all S.W.C.C. members and their caving friends.

Yours faithfully,
J. Dyer,
Secretary, Speleology Sub-Section.

BRITISH NYLON SPINNERS SPORTS AND SOCIAL CLUB SPELEOLOGY SUB-SECTION

PROGRAMME FOR CAVING SYMPOSIUM - SEPTEMBER 26/27th, 1959.

Saturday 26th September 1959.

- 0900 hrs Pwll Blaen Onneu. A recently opened pot in the Llan gattock area. This is a moderate cave.
- 0900 hrs Machen Lead Mine. An old lead mine containing some interesting formations. It is entered by a 50ft shaft. Newport area.
- Details of meeting places for both trips will be sent to those interested.
- 1730 hrs. Tea at the B.N.S. Clubhouse.
- 1830 hrs. Illustrated Talk. "Recent Advances in Mendip Caving." Speaker: Dr. O.C. Lloyd. (U.B.S.S.)
- 1910 hrs. Discussion.
- 1920 hrs. Illustrated Talk. "Recent Advances in South Wales Caving. (excluding Agen Allwedd.)" Speaker: from S.W.C.C.
- 2015 hrs. Illustrated Talk. "Agen Allwedd." Speaker: D. Leitch. (H.C.C.)
- 2100 hrs. Discussion.
- 2130 hrs. Films "La Nuit des Temps." Cave Paintings in the Dordogne. "Padirac."

Sunday, 27th September 1959.

- 0900 hrs. Trip into Agen Allwedd. Under leaders from H.C.C. and B.N.S. Those unacquainted with the cave will be taken to the Turkey and Summertime series. This will be a long trip (9 Hour) and will give the visitor an opportunity to see many of the places discussed during the above meeting.

2. CAVING IN NORTH WALES.

It was in 1950 when my attention was first drawn to this area by a chapter in Baker's "Netherworld of Mendip". In this he gave an account of some of his explorations in the Ceiriog Cave, near Chirk. That Easter, as I was passing by, I located the entrance but went no further than the first chamber.

Two years later after a photographic excursion into O.F.D. with Peter Wild of Dyserth, I was persuaded to join him for a days caving in the Vale of Clwyd. Later in the year we had a most enjoyable time studying odd sinks and resurgences in the Meirchion and Elwy valleys. At that time we noted a promising hole in one of the Brasgyll Caves and the following year I attempted to enlarge it but with no success, mainly because we ran out of chemicals. It wasn't until last June that I was able to revisit the area this time in company with five members of the Stoke Pothole Club.

This trip was in the nature of a reconnaissance and introduction with a lot of motoring but little caving except, that is, on the Saturday when we explored the Ceiriog Cave. The G.R. of this cave is 33/265.376. After a preliminary scramble through a veritable jungle, we found that the best approach was to cross the river bridge at Castle Mill, turn east at the junction and, a few yards up the road, stop at some disused limekilns where there was plenty of room to park the cars and change. From there, we crossed the road and descended direct to the cave down a fortyfive degree slope.

The cave lies twenty feet above the south bank of the river in a small limestone outcrop, at that time heavily disguised with vegetation. The entrance is at first sight imposing but this is due to natural stoping and the ensuing passage is small. After several bends this opened out and we entered a long but narrow chamber littered with debris. This was followed by a tilted rift-like chamber some forty feet long; its walls were shattered but appeared safe enough. From then on the way was characterised by some "sporting" crawls and squeezes in a maze of narrow passages that occasionally opened out to standing room size. What few formations there were were dead or dying but nonetheless interesting. For the first two or three hundred feet the walls were very ragged, the sort of thing characteristic of the caves in the reef limestones at Castleton in Derbyshire. Imperceptibly this changed and towards the end of our explorations the passages and hollows assumed a more rounded shape indicative of a solutional origin. These, we found, petered out in clay chokes and narrow channels. The lower levels of the cave are wet, muddy and narrow and were not fully explored on this occasion, but perhaps the cries of anguish from a wet and muddy writer had something to do with this!

We took no bearings or measurements but Baker estimated the distance covered into the hill to be about five hundred feet. P. Wallis in the Belfry Bulletin of November 1949 intimates that a survey has been made, I think by Peter Wild and his friends but I have not confirmed this. At any rate, we were very tired when we emerged and after only two hours of caving. On reflection, however, I can recommend a trip there although its possibilities are few.

On the following day we visited the Afon Meirchion Cave, g.r. 33/023.698. Having forgotten its exact location I took the party up the riverbed: an assault course akin to that of an Irish hedge. One of us who had been in Malaya found

conditions familiar and we were all very relieved when we arrived at the cave entrance. Un-happily we were not dressed for caving and we only confirmed that the cave is still there!

The entrance is similar to the Ceiriog but it normally discharges a small stream. In 1952 Peter Wild and I were able to crawl through the low entrance passage into a chamber. A crawl under a rock arch led us to a small aven and to a crawl through river gravel which quickly brought us to a fair sized stream passage. This was all too short as it was soon terminated by a pool. In view of the drought this year it would have been interesting to see if it was still there.

We found an easier way back to the road and climbing down the side of the bridge (Pont-y-Trap) we followed the Meirchion down to its confluence with the Elwy - a fine river flowing along a well wooded valley with high limestone crags on the far side. Following the Elwy downstream for a few yards, we came to a small footbridge over a small stream that emerged from a hole in the cliff. This was impenetrable but the dig looked incredibly easy. I stress that although the Meirchion Cave was dry and the Elwy very low, water was still flowing from this spring. Later in the year we may revisit it and start a dig.

The Brasgyll Caves were just up the road but we ignored them and headed for the coast where, after a lazy hour on the beach, we took the South road from Llandulas to look for a mine level cum cave overlooking the Dulus valley. This was found with some difficulty and should anyone follow our footsteps the following instructions will suffice. At point 33/913.770 can be seen a minor road running east. To the north and on the east side a narrow track runs across the open land and rises gently but more or less parallel to the rocky crags above. After a hundred yards or so and above the houses by the road side several small but indistinct mine tips will be seen. A little searching will soon reveal a prominent cave entrance although a little scramble is necessary to reach it.

Having changed this time we followed the passage into the hill after having studied a very large stalagmite that someone had deposited at the entrance. The cave is almost wholly natural and the miners had carved a deep trench through the clay fill. Solution hollows are prominent for the whole of its length while about halfway in a twelve foot deep mine shaft with well-ginged sides dropped to a lower level which we did not explore. The main passage ran straight into the hill for a quarter of a mile but terminated in a chamber some thirty feet high by twenty wide. It was hopelessly blocked with miners debris that appeared to have come from the other side, wherever that is. Above was a small passage which, we understand climbs at fortyfive degrees to terminate in a choke. A Geological Memoir (?) mentions that this level ran into the hill for a mile so the prospects are obvious.

All in all it was a good weekend with a most welcome change of scene. From the caving point of view it is connoisseurs country with theoretically poor possibilities. Reading the lengthy article in "British Caving" it would appear that most of what there is to know is known but the same could be said of Devon a few years ago. Perhaps the vastnesses of Agen Allwedd, G.B. and Lancaster Pot have spoiled us and that nowadays we search for the sensational rather than the

merely interesting. Anyone looking for the sensational in N. Wales should stay away but anyone with a true love of the underground and its natural history will find a wealth of interest. And he is not likely to be bothered by small boys, screaming for help at the bottom of some dark abyss!

A.W. Ashwell.

3. OGOF FOEL FAWR

On Whit Saturday Clive Jones, John Alexander, Bill Birchenough and myself set off to have a dig in Bill Birchenough's 'pet' cave Ogof Foel Fawr. As none of us except Bill had been in before we were pleasantly surprised to see the size of the passages in the cave. This happy state did not last very long unfortunately as the main passage soon dwindles down to a miserable little rat hole out of which blows a strong draught. Despite its small size the passage looked "diggable." The flow appeared to be false, composed of calcified mud. Several members of the club had previously had a go at this passage and after several bangs Bill announced he could see a black space at the end of the rat hole but couldn't get through. Sucker, as "thinnest man" in the party was elected to have a crack at getting through. Minus helmet and using a torch and head as a bulldozer some progress was made but a way could still not be forced. Finally as it was as difficult to go back as forwards one last effort landed me in the Black space which was in fact a reasonably sized cross passage. After a quick examination of the passage, I found it 'went' in one direction but was blocked by stals in the opposite direction. I returned, digging as I went, to the others. We went outside for a bite before proceeding with the exploration. Clive was first through the squeeze, which is about 20' long, and the rest followed not knowing whether we were going to be disappointed or discover that rare phenomenon, an extensive cave system.

The Passage was very dry and well decorated with 'dead' stalagmites, but alas it 'Petered' out after only 60-70 ft. but a cursory examination showed the way to be on through a low passage in the left wall. Clive was well in the lead now down a 4-5ft high passage with several sideways squeezes caused by stal. bosses. Suddenly a shout rang out "BONES"! we arrived on the scene to see Clive standing in a chamber about 10ft square surrounded by a mass of rocks and bones. The first set were lying in the passage leading to the chamber and appeared to be in good condition, but our attention was drawn to a large bone about 1ft long and 2-3ins. in diameter, by modern standards, big; nearby lay a skull and a large horn, the biggest any of us had seen. * We now realised that the surface could not be far away owing to the presence of intense condensation and surface insects. In front of us appeared to be a boulder slope coming down from a shake-hole, on the left a passage with another boulder slope and on the right a passage leading downwards to another chamber. The draught appears to come from the boulder slope in the left hand passage. (A fact that has since been proved, as audible contact has been achieved between this passage and the surface.) We decided to explore the chamber on the right, but while down there a movement occurred in the boulders above and we only escaped severe headaches by the thoughtfulness of Bill who inserted a chock stone in the entrance to the chamber.

As we were all tired by now we decided to call it a day, taking one of

* We realised that we had to tread very carefully indeed as we had no wish to disturb anything that might be of value to archaeologists.

the horns with us as evidence of our days work. On our return we explored another tight passage in the new series which led into a fine grotto which was probably once a crystal pool. A small fissure leading off this was forced but led nowhere and contained only one very frightened bat.

Finally after about five interesting hours underground we walked wearily down the mountain brandishing our horn and sledge hammers etc. - much to the surprise of the Bank Holiday trippers.

This day out yielded about 200ft of very interesting cave with the promise of more to come, some old bones, food for the archaeologist and four gelignite type headaches.

Since the original exploration the cave has been revisited by Lewis Railton, Bill Little and myself to enlarge the squeeze and photograph the bones, during this second trip, David Jenkins and David Dilly made contact with Bill Little via a shakehole which might possibly become a new way in.

The archaeologists inform us that the horn belongs to an early, now extinct form of ox, a *Bos Priemogenius*. Investigation is still going on into this find and we all await the conclusions.

Peter Guest.

4. THREE DIVES IN OGOF FFYNNON DDU.

The Hon. Editor is pleased to announce that the Club now has its own resident diver. This unfortunate person began training shortly after the previous visit of Cave Divers Buxton and Wells to Ffynnon Ddu in July 1958 and having undergone a year's fagging, beating and general ill-treatment is now considered fit to make his own arrangements for meting out the same punishment to others. In the interests of self-preservation it is felt that his identity should not be revealed.

The recent operation was held at rather short notice (apologies due here to our Hon. Secretary) on August 2nd with the object of making a reconnaissance of Hush Sump, which had not previously been explored. The number of divers launched was to depend on the carrying power available over the Bank Holiday, and it was decided that a small mobile force supporting one diver would give the most rapid results with the least amount of waiting around for the helpers.

Accordingly, the first assault party, consisting of Mary Nutt, Peter Guest, Bill Sheppard, Brian Walton, John Buxton (controller) and the diver left the Grithig for Boulder Chamber, laden with equipment, at about 11.45 a.m. to be joined shortly afterwards by Bill Little (who held the rope), Brian Fenn (official timekeeper), David Jenkins and Les Hawes (photographers).

After the usual preparations the diver was launched at 1.45 p.m. with "flashing bulb" signalling device working well. Visibility was about 10ft. and as the floor was of boulders and gravel remained good throughout. After a good look round diver began to descend, following the left hand wall, and searching the right hand wall with his beam for possible openings. These did not materialise, but at a depth of about 10 ft. and distance 18 ft. from base, Hush Sump

turned left through 90° and after a short level stretch began to ascend as a passage in solid rock. At this juncture, diver was brought to a halt by his lifeline snagging on the sharp corner, and decided to return and report.

The second dip began with the diver coiling up a quantity of line in order to pay himself out round the corner, and Brian Walton going over to Pot Sump to see if the aflo beam could be seen. This time the extra line allowed a large air surface to be seen and after some effort, diver broke surface into a large chamber feeling highly pleased with himself. His illusions were rudely shattered however when a light shone down on him from above and he espied Brian's smiling face looking down at him from what was, in fact, the top of Pot Sump. This dip ended with the diver retiring in confusion but reaching base a good deal quicker than Brian, who had to struggle back through the boulders. Proof of this connection between Hush Sump and Pot Sump is very valuable, however, to future operations, since Boulder Chamber can be made the main base and all diving begun from Hush Sump.

Dive II, held at 3p.m. on the way out, was to take a second look at the main rising in the cave in the light of modern equipment. The water was crystal clear and visibility to the limit of light penetration. At about 30 ft in, the passage, which was never very large, began to snag the diver's equipment but by careful fitting in it was found possible to proceed. At about 50 ft. a rather tattered polythene bag was found hooked on a projection in the roof. Vague thoughts about how to turn round began to enter the diver's mind here, but at what was later calculated as 110 ft. (by the lifeline) a tiny chamber was encountered at which the passage turned right - i.e., away from Boulder Chamber, and could be seen meandering for possibly another 20 ft. before a bend stopped further observation. At this chamber, prudence dictated return, braving once again the shoal of fierce nyphargus encountered on the inward journey.

Thus the original report of Weaver, Coase and Balcombe is substantiated by this reconnaissance, except that the distance is greater than originally thought and the depth (12 ft. at the turn) less.

Whether beyond the turn the passage becomes too small to negotiate remains to be checked at some future time, though Balcombe felt that it might be penetrated with compact equipment. Meanwhile, has anyone dropped a polythene bag in Boulder Series?

A short break was now held at the surface, with very welcome refreshment from Sylvia Barrows, before Dive III was begun at 5.26 p.m. - Gothic Passage. This nearly began with the diver inadvertently entering the water riding on a large boulder but luckily he managed to stop it with his leg (ouch!)

Gothic Passage began promisingly - high, clear, and solid rock all round, but soon narrowed down and only by crawling could the limit be reached (60 ft.) where a bottomless bucket was found jammed between roof and floor and the passage broke up into impenetrable rifts. One seemed to go down to the right, while a very wide bedding plane 9" high low down in the wall of the passage went off to the left.

This completed the diving for the day, and after having presented the bucket to John Barrows the party retired for tea. The diver would like to convey

his thanks to the staunch band of helpers without whose support the operation would have been impossible, and to Sylvia for that timely cup of tea which got everyone back for the third time despite having regained the warm, sunny surface.

Hon. Editor.

5. THIRTY HOURS UNDERGROUND Camping in Aggy Aggy

A few weeks ago, an idea was formed in the mind of Peter Guest and Stan Whitehead of the Cave and Crag Club, of tackling the now formidable cave of Agen Allwedd by camping in the Main Passage, thus enabling the Assault Party to go to its limit without having to worry about the entrance series on the way out. This was also an experiment in camping under such conditions, as none of us had ever done so before. The following article is mainly concerned with what we found out by our mistakes, rather than a thesis on the composition of Aggy-Aggy and where its sinks and resurgences are. On this subject I and no doubt many others could write volumes.

The Assault Party consisted of three members of the S.W.C.C. - Peter Guest (leader), Brian de Graaf and Mary Nutt, and three members of the Cave and Crag - Stan Whitehead, Derrick Edge and Frank Salt. These were nobly supported by John Shepherd (Leader of the Support Party), Peter Shepherd, Ken Watts, Ashley Peters, A.I.E.E., Bill Stubbs, David Harrison and Marcel Thoms, while Jes Cathrall held the camp on the outside ready to brew coffee etc., for all in need when they emerged.

On Thursday night we assembled at Camp Hill, Birmingham, to gather together all the kit which was to be taken down to the cave. This was packed in polythene bags inside kit bags. Later this was proved not to be the best method as kit bags tend to bend just when you don't want them to! Next time Ammunition Boxes will be used, the type with handles on both ends.

When we arrived at Llangattock on Friday night, we pitched our tents and settled ourselves into the Scout Hut. Then at Midnight the support party entered the cave with the equipment. At 7.45 a.m. on Saturday the first one re-entered the outside world, and at 8 a.m. the Assault Party started on its journey.

Inside, our tents had been erected, while sleeping bags and dry clothes were still inside polythene bags to protect them from the damp. In addition there were two Large primuses, two sets of pans, mugs and spoons and two canvas water buckets. The tinned food was rather battered, and all the paper labels had come off. (suggest painted labels next time) On each tin we had stuck a "jiffy" tin opener. This may sound extravagant, but as soon as one put anything down, it was liable never to be seen again, as everything rapidly became covered in mud. Food at Base Camp consisted of Irish Stew (one tin per person), one large tin of Creamed Rice between two (this could be increased to one each). I suggest that porage or some other filling food should also be taken next time. Our coffee and sugar had a mishap on the way in through not being packed as well as it might. However a very good substitute drink was made with one block of Milk Chocolate, Dried Milk and the remains of the sugar boiled up together. For the trip out from base camp and back again, we had

one Tommy Cooker between two (highly recommended for any long caving trip), one small tin of soup each, (although large ones would have fitted the cookers better) and one small tin of prunes between two. Each member also carried a block of Kendal Mint Cake and two packets of Glucose tablets.

During our stay underground we all suffered slightly from exposure, due to getting wet waist deep when we crossed the Turkey Pool. I suggest that in future large polythene bags be carried to put all clothing in, just wearing the bare essentials to cross places like this. De-hydration was also felt, due mainly to the humidity; everyone had either dry or sore throats. Eyes were dilated so much that no colour was to be seen. Very noticeable was the variation in various members endurance at different times, and how their 'second winds' came at different stages of the trip. Mental tiredness also came at staggered times, although it was obvious to see the reserve of energy which came into use on the return trip. This was made in nearly record time, mainly I think to keep ourselves warm, but also spurred on by thoughts of a good hot meal at the base camp. The general opinion was that we had all suffered a drop in body temperature, although this cannot be confirmed as we hadn't a thermometer with us. Some hours later on arrival at base we still weren't back to normal. (Frank reckoned later that the average calorie loss per person was 10,000 during the whole operation). After changing into dry clothes and eating a hot meal we retired into the tents (which were essential, because of the draughts) and had a few hours sleep, the time being about 2 a.m. on Sunday. Later, at about 9 a.m. that morning we emerged, feeling refreshed and quite fit. Morale was high. Breakfast consisted of the creamed rice, although Peter, Brian and I had a misfortune with ours. Due to the labels having come off the tins, we accidentally mixed rice, onion soup and jam together, which when cooked had to do for breakfast. This is NOT the ideal combination. (Actually I made it myself from an old Dutch recipe:- Consomme Aggy Aggy - Hon. Ed.)

At midday the support party re-entered the cave to remove the equipment. The assault party also helping with some of it on this occasion. The fit feeling wore off a lot sooner than usual, and on re-entering daylight we (2 p.m.) all had trouble with temporary blindness; and very heavy breathing, due to the sudden rise in temperature of the atmosphere around us. Here Jes came into her own, and supplied everyone with hot sweet coffee, which made rapid our recovery.

Many, many thanks to the Support Party who worked wonderfully well, and without whose help this venture would never have taken place.

Mary S. Nutt.

6. AROUND AND ABOUT

Dig This!

The weekend following Whitsun, David Hunt, David Coombes, Arnold and I visited Pant Mawr. Our object was to see if the continuation of the main passage, just before the sump passage, could be dug.

Things looked good (HA!) and August Bank Holiday Sunday saw a larger party return to the scene. A trench 2 ft deep and 2 ft wide was driven into the

soft sand and clay for a distance of 20 ft and then we called it a day.

Who knows how far we have to go, but it is well worth pushing for at least another 20 ft.

Clive Jones.

Carregwylan

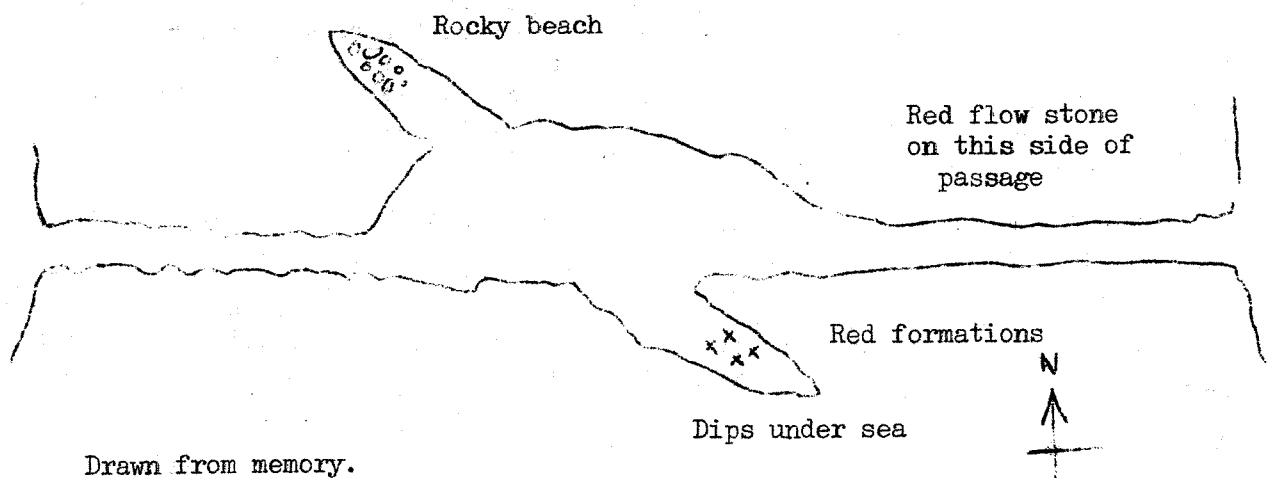
Looking through some Club records, I notice a cave near Moylgrove: that was all. There is a place of that name near Cardigan, but since all this area consists of shale I did not take much notice. Later walking along the cliffs near Carregwylan, N G 105458 sheet 139 I saw a hole at sea level at one side of the above and another on the other side. Then I noticed there were a number of bands of iron pyrites that followed the line of this hole, and since the sea was rather high at the time, I entered on another day at about half tide from the Eastern end.

The first 60 ft. was straight, about 10 ft wide and 10 ft high above sea level, depth unknown. Here there was a chamber about 30' wide, 25 - 30 ft high and about 60 - 70 ft long, with a few rocks sticking up in the middle and at the west end a tunnel like the entrance. There is also a cross passage, the R.H. leg being about 50 ft long. The L.H. leg ended below sea level after about 40 ft; there were red formations here, some well below High Tide. I hope to return in a boat and with better lights to explore further and also take a look at some other holes nearby.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the S.W. there is a small sink. The stream appears again a few yards away in a large hole which is connected by a number of passages with the sea. These can be dived quite easily. This place is called the "Witches Cauldron."

I do not know if either of these caves is the one mentioned in the records.

Bill Birchenough.



Drawn from memory.

Pulpit Hole, Ystradfellte.

On the afternoon of the 2nd May this year, Mike Duerden, Clive Jones, Bill Birchenough and I decided to go and have a look at Pulpit Hole, which is the largest and most impressive of the holes near the wall at the top of Gwaen Cefn-y-Garreg. It has a nice grit roof and a couple of deep rifts which are boulder choked at the bottom.

While the others were working at the bottom of one of these rifts, I crawled along to the end of Red Mud Passage, which goes off on the far side, and at the end I found a small hole which was giving quite an appreciable draught. The others then joined me and after a bit of enlarging we were able to squeeze through.

We found ourselves in a chamber about 4 ft high with a black peat-like floor. There were quite a few of the soft black formations which are common in caves of this type and also some very fine black-red mud gours on the floor. One end of the chamber was blocked while the other led across the swimming pool.

By swimming pool I don't mean the ordinary, insignificant, wet variety which one comes across in such places as Weighbridge Quarry or Dan-yr-Ogof Dry Valley. This one is vastly superior for it is filled with a couple of feet of deliciously thin, bright red dye. After swimming across this pool we came to the first pitch which stopped us as we had taken no ladder with us.

The following weekend I returned with Seaton Phillips and with the aid of a ladder we went to the bottom of the pitch which was about 25 ft, to find that the draught came from a small hole at the bottom which appeared to lead down another rift.

When I went there next it was with Eric Inson and with the aid of chemicals we were able to make this hole a good deal bigger and also open up the rift a bit.

The next time with Bill Birchenough and Mike Duerden we went down this second 15 ft pitch with the aid of a ladder. It was blocked with stones at the bottom except for a narrow crack about 2 ins wide from which the draught was coming. We enlarged it and got through into a parallel rift. We entered the rift on the top of a pile of boulders into the bottom of which was flowing a very small stream. Crawling up stream we came across a number of chimneys in the roof but we couldn't see the tops of them due to the amount of water coming down. They might well be the bottoms of the rifts at the entrance.

That is as far as we have got at the moment, but a word of warning to anyone else who might care to go there. Don't expect to be able to drive up to the cave, go in, come out, and then drive away again. If and when you do come out (the mud is quite deep), you will be completely saturated in bright red mud which it is quite impossible to wash off. The usual practice is to walk down to Porth yr-Ogof and walk into the river which then also turns red. As a matter of fact on one occasion, an Old Lady was heard to say to another Old Lady, "It never used to be this colour."

Bill Harris.

Completing the Circuit at Will's Hole

On the 2nd May this year Mike Duerden and I decided to go and have a look at the top end of the Main Passage in Will's Hole to see if it was worth starting a dig there.

After looking at the sump, which is now full of gravel and mud washed in from the Silica Mine, we went up to the other end of the Main Passage. There, everything was very much the same as it has always been with the stream from the Silica Mine coming in low down on the left, except that there had been a small collapse in the roof and a few feet up it was possible to see a flat ripple-marked roof. I climbed up the hole and was able to see along a small space over the top of the mud and also to hear the stream beyond. Fortunately the mud was quite soft and I was able to dig a way along it using my hands. When my body was flat out in the hole I was able to remove the last bit of mud, which must have been acting as a dam to the stream for it now decided to flow down the new channel I had dug for it, but the ill-mannered thing didn't wait for me to get out of the way. Saturated I was then able to get into a space beyond and call Mike through. Here there was room to stand up.

There were two ways on. One, a dry rift going on at floor level and the other, a wet rift in the ceiling from which the stream was pouring. We took the dry rift first but after about 15 ft it became too tight although we could see into a larger space beyond. Chemicals might make it go.

Then we climbed up into the hole in the roof, through the water, to a space where we could once again sit together but the stream was again pouring from a rift above us. This time it was tightish and if possible wetter and about 10 ft up I got into a position in which I could see daylight. It was impossible to get through though, so whilst I waited Mike went around to the overhang about 200 yds up river from Will's Hole, where the stream from the Silica Mine goes underground and about 10 mins later we were able to talk to each other through the hole.

Bill Harris.

