

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Circular to Members.

[September 1958]

The activities of the society are summarised in the Secretary's Report in Proceedings, Vol.8, No.2., which accompanies this circular. The programme of meetings for the coming session is enclosed. A number of distinguished persons will address the society and it is hoped that there will be a good attendance. This year starts a repeat series of tutorials commencing with some on the Geology of the Mendips by Dr. Donovan. In 1959 the series will be on the Prehistory of Europe as a whole and in 1960 on the Prehistory of the Bristol Region.

CAVING. In July a party of 12 went back to County Clare, Eire, to continue the work that the Society has been doing there. For once the weather was reasonably kind and the party was not flooded out of the caves on a single occasion. Most of the time was devoted to completing the survey of Branch Passage Gallery in Pollnagollum, (Slieve Elva) and check surveying in the Main Cave and side passages. The survey loops closed with only very small errors. A short and reasonably easy connection between Gunman's Cave and Branch Passage Gallery was found and this made a great difference to the time taken to complete the survey. Branch Passage itself was surveyed to the end, the former stop at Barrier 2 being passed at the second attempt by skillful and daring climbing. Pollelva, (Slieve Elva), was surveyed and a probable connection with Pollnagollum found. This connection will have to be verified next year. The survey of Faunarooska was completed.

Various tests were made, using fluorescein, to trace underground water routes. The three risings concerned remained, apparently, obstinately clear but this year water samples were collected at regular intervals and brought back to England. Here they were examined under ultra-violet light by two observers working quite independently. All the samples that should have been positive were found to be so and there was a correct gradation of the intensity of fluorescence. This simple experiment has revolutionised the technique of tracing water underground by fluorescein. Simple visual examination of the water at the rising, even in daylight, has been shown to be entirely unreliable where a negative is obtained. All such negatives obtained in the past by simple visual examination must now be reviewed. There are other implications. It is hoped to publish a short paper on this in Proceedings in 1959.

At Manor Farm, (Mendip), the shaft has been deepened and timbered to the bottom. However the very solid choke still continues and water does not get away except very slowly. Some progress has been made with other digs.

The Bristol Water Works Company have acquired the water undertaking of the Axbridge Rural District Council and considerable property

has changed hands including the land in which lies G.B. Cave. It is not expected there will be any major changes in our rights to this and other caves though the terms of the actual agreement with the B.W.W. have not been finally settled.

ARCHAEOLOGY. Some further work has been done at Little Solsbury Hill camp. A number of small objects were found and these are now on exhibition in our museum. It is still not possible to state the form and size of the huts in either phase I or II of the occupation of the site. A ditch of unknown length and breadth but 2 feet deep was found. It starts at right angles to the escarpment and runs towards the interior. Its purpose is obscure. It belongs to the earliest phase and was cut before the rampart-wall was constructed, as this wall dips into the ditch.

At Priddy work has continued in the south circle. At the entrance, the east side has been completed and a start made on the west. Stone holes and pits have been found and their arrangement suggests that phase I may have been a form of stone setting without bank or ditch, and that the bank and ditch represent phase II. A wide cutting has been made in the southeast sector through the bank where it seems to have been largely levelled. Post holes have been found but their irregular arrangement may presage a second entrance.

The major work has been the excavation of the Roman Temple on Brean Down, with Mr. ApSimon as director assisted by Mr. Brian Davison of Belfast University. (An Interim Report appears in the Proceedings). Bad weather seriously interfered with the work but most of the buildings have been completely excavated. The work was carried on continuously for over six weeks. Volunteers have come from many places, including Germany and there was an average of 12 on the site. Two annexes, one on the S.W. and the other on the N.W. corner of the temple were found this year, and the burial shown in the plan lies inside the N.W. annexe. It is intrusive and had been disturbed.

An innovation was to have the Interim Report pre-printed and available for sale on the site. Income from such sales has considerably exceeded the cost of printing and the surplus is earmarked for the printing of the final report. On the other hand the total cost of the excavation has been of the order of £300 of which Weston-Super-Mare has provided about £100 and sundry services, including tools on the site, crockery etc., at field headquarters. We thus have to find about £200. So far about £140 has been collected and further contributions would be welcome. Some rooms at the Old Fort at the seaward end of the Down were put at our disposal for Field Headquarters. They proved very comfortable. Paid caterers were employed. The catering and H.Q. expense have been met entirely out of the charges made to volunteers for accommodation and food. The excavations were visited by thousands of holiday makers. Visitors came specially from many parts to see what was being done. We had helpers from all over the country some from the faculties of Medicine and Science of the University of Bristol and visits by members of the staff of these faculties.

DINNER. On March 19th 1959 the society will be 40 years old. It is proposed to mark the occasion by a dinner to be held at about this time, probably Saturday March 21st. A further notice will be issued on this matter later.

HISTORY of the SOCIETY. On various occasions in the past few years it has been suggested that a history of the society should be written. More recently senior members of the University staff have expressed the view that such a history, especially of the earlier years, should be prepared. You are therefore invited to submit accounts and anecdotes about the society giving dates and names where possible. It is admitted that not all the anecdotes could be published but they could be put in the records for the enlightenment of future generations.

D.R. Preston.

Hon. Secretary.
Sept. 1958.